THE

EARTHLY PARADISE

A POEM.

BY

WILLIAM MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON.

POPULAR EDITION.

IN TEN PARTS.

PART VI.

ACONTIUS AND CYDIPPE.

THE MAN WHO NEVER LAUGHED AGAIN.

THE STORY OF RHODOPE.

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OCTOBER drew our elders to a house,
That mid the tangled vines, and clamorous
Glad vintagers, stood calm, slim-pillared, white,
As though it fain would hide away from sight
The joy that through the sad lost autumn rung.
As hot the day was, as when summer hung,
With worn feet, on the last step of July,
Ashamed to cast its flowery raiment by:
Round the old men the white porch-pillars stood,
Gold-stained, as with the sun, streaked as with blood,
Blood of the earth, at least, and to and fro
Before them did the high-girt maidens go,
Eager, bright-eyed, and careless of tomorn;
And young men with them, nowise made forlorn
By love and autumn tide; and in nowise
Content to pray for love with hopeless eyes,
Close lips, and timid hands; rather, indeed,
Lest youth and life should fail them at their need,
At what light joyous semblance of him ran
Amidst the vines, 'twixt eyes of maid and man,
Wilfully blind they caught.

But now at last,
As in the apple-gathering tide late past,
So would the elders do now; in a while,
He who should tell the tale, with a grave smile,
And eyes fixed on the fairest damsel there,

Began to say: "Ye blithe folk well might bear
To hearken to a sad tale, yet to-day
No heart I have to cast all hope away
From out my history: so be warned hereby,
Nor wait unto the end, deliciously
To nurse your pity; for the end is good
And peaceful, howso buffeting and rude
Winds, waves, and men were, ere the end was done."

The sweet eyes that his eyes were set upon
Were hid by shamefast lids as he did speak,
And redder colour burned on her fresh cheek,
And her lips smiled, as, with a half-sad sigh,
He 'gan to tell this lovesome history.

THE STORY OF ACONTIUS AND CYDIPPE.

ARGUMENT.

A CERTAIN man coming to Delos beheld a noble damsel there, and was smitten with the love of her, and made all things of no account but the winning of her, which at last he brought about in strange wise.

A CERTAIN island-man of old,
Well fashioned, young, and wise and bold,
Voyaged awhile in Greekish seas,
Till Delos of the Cyclades
His keel made, and ashore he went;
And, wandering with no fixed intent,
With others of the shipmen there,
They came into a garden fair,
Too sweet for sea-tossed men, I deem,
If they would scape the lovesome dream
That youth and May cast o'er the earth,
If they would keep their careless mirth
For hands of eld to deal withal.

So in that close did it befall

That 'neath the trees well wrought of May
These sat amidmost of the day
Not dry-lipped, and belike a-strain,
All gifts of that sweet time to gain,
And yet not finding all enow
That at their feet the May did throw,
But longing, half-expecting still
Some new delight their cup to fill—
Yea, overfill, to make all strange
Their lazy joy with piercing change.
Therewith their youngest, even he
I told of first, all suddenly
'Gan sing a song that fitted well
The thoughts that each man's heart did tell
Unto itself, and as his throat
Moved with the music, did he note
Through half-shut eyes a company
Of white-armed maidens drawing nigh,
Well marshalled, as if there they went
Upon some serious work intent.

SONG.

FAIR is the night and fair the day,
Now April is forgot of May,
Now into June May falls away;
Fair day, fair night, O give me back
The tide that all fair things did lack
Except my love, except my sweet!

Blow back, O wind! thou art not kind,
Though thou art sweet; thou hast no mind
Her hair about my sweet to wind;
O flowery sward, though thou art bright,
I praise thee not for thy delight,
Thou hast not kissed her silver feet.

Thou know'st her not, O rustling tree,
What dost thou then to shadow me,
Whose shade her breast did never see?
O flowers, in vain ye bow adown!
Ye have not felt her odorous gown
Brush past your heads my lips to meet

Flow on, great river—thou mayst deem
That far away, a summer-stream,
Thou sawest her limbs amidst thee gleam,
And kissed her foot, and kissed her knee,
Yet get thee swift unto the sea!
With nought of true thou wilt me greet.

And thou that men call by my name,
O helpless one, hast thou no shame
That thou must even look the same,
As while agone, as while agone,
When thou and she were left alone,
And hands, and lips, and tears did meet?

Grow weak and pine, lie down to die,
O body in thy misery,
Because short time and sweet goes by;

O foolish heart, how weak thou art!
Break, break, because thou needs must part
From thine own love, from thine own sweet!

What was it that through half-shut eyes
Pierced to his heart, and made him rise
As one the July storm awakes
When through the dawn the thunder breaks?
What was it that the languor clove,
Wherewith unhurt he sang of love?
How was it that his eyes had caught
Her eyes alone of all; that nought
The others were but images,
While she, while she amidst of these
Not first or last—when she was gone,
Why must he feel so left alone?
An image in his heart there was
Of how amidst them one did pass
Kind-eyed and soft, and looked at him;
And now the world was waxen dim
About him, and of little worth,
Seemed all the wondrous things of earth,
And fain would he be all alone,
To wonder why his mirth was gone;
To wonder why it seemed so strange
That in nought else was any change,
When his old life seemed passed away,
And joy in narrow compass lay,

He scarce knew where. With laugh and song
His fellows mocked the dim world's wrong,
Nor noted him as changed o'ermuch;
Or if their jests his mood did touch,
To his great wonder lightly they
By stammering word were turned away.

Well, from the close they went at last,
And through the noble town they passed,
And saw the wonders wrought of old
Therein, and heard famed stories told
Of many a thing; and as a dream
Did all things to Acontius seem.
But when night's wings came o'er that place,
And men slept, piteous seemed his case
And wonderful, that therewithal
Night helped him not. From wall to wall
Night-long his weary eyes he turned,
Till in the east the daylight burned.
And then the pang he would not name,
Stung by the world's change, fiercer came
Across him, and in haste he rose,
Driven unto that flowery close
By restless longing, knowing not
What part therein his heart had got,
Nor why he thitherward must wend.

And now had night's last hope an end,
When to the garden-gate he came.

In grey light did the tulip flame
Over the sward made grey with dew,
And as unto the place he drew
Where yesterday he sang that song
The ousel-cock sang sweet and strong,
Though almost ere the sky grew grey
Had he begun to greet the day.
There now, as by some strong spell bound,
Acontius paced that spot of ground,
Restless, with wild thoughts in his head;
While round about the white-thorn shed
Sweet fragrance, and the lovely place,
Lonely of mankind, lacked no grace
That love for his own home would have.
Well sang the birds, the light wind drave
Through the fresh leaves, untouched as yet
By summer and its vain regret;
Well piped the wind, and as it swept
The garden through, no sweet thing slept,
Nor might the scent of blossoms hide
The fresh smell of the country side
It bore with it; and the green bay,
Whose breast it kissed so far away,
Spake sometimes yet amid the noise
Of rustling leaves and song-birds' voice.

So there awhile our man did pace,
Still wondering at his piteous case
That, certes, not to anyone

Had happed before—awhile agone
So pleased to watch the world pass by
With all its changing imagery;
So hot to play his part therein,
From each day's death good life to win;
And now, with a great sigh, he saw
The yellow level sunbeams draw
Across the wet grass, as the sun
First smote the trees, and day begun
Smiled on the world, whose summer bliss
In nowise seemed to better his.
Then, as he thought thereof, he said:
"Surely all wisdom is clean dead
Within me. Nought I lack that I,
By striving, may not come anigh
Among the things that men desire;
And why then like a burnt-out fire,
Is my life grown?"

E'en as he spoke
A throstle-cock beside him broke
Into the sweetest of his song,
Yet with his sweet note seemed to wrong
The unknown trouble of that morn,
And made him feel yet more forlorn.
Then he cried out, "O fool, go forth!
The world is grown of no less worth
Than yester-morn it was; go then
And play thy part among brave men
As thou hadst will to do before

Thy feet first touched this charmed shore
Where all is changed."

But now the bird
Flew from beside him, and he heard
A rustling nigh, although the breeze
Had died out mid the thick-leaved trees.
Therewith he raised his eyes and turned,
And a great fire within him burned,
And his heart stopped awhile, for there,
Against a flowering thorn-bush fair,
Hidden by tulips to the knee,
His heart's desire his eyes did see.
Clad was she e'en as is the dove,
Who makes the summer sad with love;
High-girded as one hastening
In swift search for some longed-for thing;
Her hair drawn by a silken band
From her white neck, and in her hand
A myrtle-spray. Panting she was
As from the daisies of the grass
She raised her eyes, and looked around
Till the astonished eyes she found
That saw not aught but even her.

There in a silence hard to bear,
Impossible to break, they stood,
With faces changed by love, and blood
So stirred, that many a year of life
Had been made eager with that strife

Of minutes; and so nigh she was
He saw the little blue veins pass
Over her heaving breast; and she
The trembling of his lips might see,
The rising tears within his eyes.

Then standing there in mazed wise
He saw the black-heart tulips bow
Before her knees, as wavering now
A half-step unto him she made,
With a glad cry, though half afraid,
He stretched his arms out, and the twain,
E'en at the birth of love's great pain,
Each unto each so nigh were grown,
That little lacked to make them one—
That little lacked but they should be
Wedded that hour; knee touching knee,
Cheek laid to cheek. So seldom fare
Love's tales, that men are wise to dare;
Rather, dull hours must pass away,
And heavy day succeed to day,
And much be changed by misery,
Ere two that love may draw anigh—
And so with these. What fear or shame
'Twixt longing heart and body came
'T were hard to tell—they lingered yet.
Well-nigh they deemed that they had met,
And that the worst was o'er; e'en then
There drew anigh the sound of men—

Loud laugh, harsh talk. With ill surprise
He saw fear change her lovesome eyes;
He knew her heart bethought it now
Of other folk, and ills that grow
From overmuch of love; but he
Cried out amidst his agony,
Yet stood there helpless, and withal
A mist across his eyes did fall,
And all seemed lost indeed, as now
Slim tulip-stem and hawthorn-bough
Slipped rustling back into their place,
And all the glory of her face
Had left the world, at least awhile,
And once more all was base and vile.

And yet, indeed, when that sharp pain
Was something dulled, and once again
Thought helped him, then to him it seemed
That she had dreamed as he had dreamed,
And, hoping not for any sight
Of love, had come made soft by night,
Made kind by longings unconfessed,
To give him good hope of the best.
Then pity came to help his love,
For now, indeed, he knew whereof
He sickened; pity came, and then
The fear of the rough sons of men,
Sore hate of things that needs must part
The loving heart from loving heart;

And at each turn it seemed as though
Fate some huge net round both did throw
To stay their feet and dim their sight
Till they were clutched by endless night
And then he fain had torn his hair,
And cried aloud in his despair,
But stayed himself as still he thought
How even that should help him nought,
That helpless patience needs must be
His loathed fellow. Wearily
He got him then from out the place,
Made lovely by her scarce-seen face,
And knew that day what longing meant.

But when the restless daylight went
From earth's face, through the weary night
He lay again in just such plight
As on the last night he had lain;
But deemed that he would go again
At daylight to that place of flowers.
So passed the night through all its hours,
But ere the dawn came, weak and worn
He fell asleep, nor woke that morn
Till all the city was astir;
And waking must he think of her
Stolen to that place to find him not—
Her parted lips, her face flushed hot,
Her panting breast and girt-up gown,
Her sleeve ill-fastened, fallen adown

From one white shoulder, her grey eyes
Fixed in their misery of surprise,
As nought they saw but birds and trees;
Her woeful lingering, as the breeze
Died 'neath the growing sun, and folk
Fresh silence of the morning broke;
And then, the death of hope confessed,
The quivering lip and heaving breast,
The burst of tears, the homeward way
Made hateful by joy past away,
The dreary day made dull and long
By hope deferred and gathering wrong.
All this for him!—and thinking thus
Their twin life seemed so piteous
That all his manhood from him fled,
And cast adown upon the bed
He sobbed and wept full sore, until
When he of grief had had his fill
He 'gan to think that he might see
His love, and cure her misery
If she should be in that same place
At that same hour when first her face
Shone on him.

So time wore away
Till on the world the high noon lay,
And then at the due place he stood,
Wondering amid his love-sick mood
Which blades of grass her foot had bent;
And there, as to and fro he went,

A certain man who seemed to be
A fisher on the troubled sea,
An old man and a poor, came nigh
And greeted him and said:

"Hereby
Thou doest well to stand, my son,
Since thy stay here will soon be done,
If of that ship of Crete thou be,
As well I deem. Here shalt thou see
Each day at noon a company
Of all our fairest maids draw nigh;
To such an one each day they go
As best can tell them how to do
In serving of the dreadful queen,
Whose servant long years hath she been,
And dwelleth by her chapel fair
Within this close; they shall be here,
E'en while I speak. Wot well, fair son,
Good need it is this should be done,
For whatso hasty word is said
That day unto the moon-crowned maid,
For such an oath is held, as though
The whole heart into it did go—
Behold, they come! A goodly sight
Shalt thou have seen, e'en if to-night
Thou diest!"

Grew Acontius wan
As the sea-cliffs, for the old man
Now pointed to the gate, wherethrough

The company of maidens drew
Toward where they stood; Acontius,
With trembling lips, and piteous
Drawn brow, turned toward them, and afar
Beheld her like the morning-star
Amid the weary stars of night.
Midmost the band went his delight,
Clad in a gown of blue, whereon
Were wrought fresh flowers, as newly won
From the May fields; with one hand she
Touched a fair fellow lovingly,
The other, hung adown, did hold
An ivory harp well strung with gold;
Gaily she went, nor seemed as though
One troublous thought her heart did know.
Acontius sickened as she came
Anigh him, and with heart aflame
For very rage of jealousy,
He heard her talking merrily
Unto her fellow—the first word
From those sweet lips he yet had heard,
Nor might he know what thing she said;
Yet presently she turned her head
And saw him, and her talk she stopped
E'en therewith, and her lids down dropped,
And trembling amid love and shame
Over her face a bright flush came;
Nathless without another look
She passed him by, whose whole frame shook

With passion as an aspen leaf.

But she being gone, all blind with grief,
He stood there long, and muttered :
"Why
Would she not note my misery?
Had it been then so hard to turn
And show me that her heart did yearn
For something nigher like mine own?
O well content to leave me lone,
O well content to stand apart,
And nurse a pleasure in thine heart,
The joy of being so well beloved,
Still taking care thou art not moved
By aught like trouble !—yet beware,
For thou mayst fall for all thy care !"

So from the place he turned away;
Some secret spell he deemed there lay,
Some bar unseen, athwart that grass,
O'er which his feet might never pass
Whatso his heart bade. Hour by hour
Passed of the day, and ever slower
They seemed to drag, and ever he
Thought of her last look wearily—
Now meant it that, now meant it this;
Now bliss, and now the death of bliss.
'But O, if once again,' he thought,
'Face unto face we might be brought,

Then doubt I not but I should read
What at her hands would be my meed,
And in such wise my life would guide;
Either the weary end to bide
E'en as I might, or strengthen me
To take the sweet felicity,
Casting by thought of fear or death—
But now when I must hold my breath,
Who knows how long, while scale mocks scale
With trembling joy, and trembling bale—
O hard to bear! O hard to bear!'

So spake he, knowing bitter fear
And hopeful longing's sharp distress,
But not the weight of hopelessness.

And now there passed by three days more,
And to the flowery place that bore
The sharp and sweet of his desire
Each day he went, his heart afire
With foolish hope. Each day he saw
The band of damsels toward him draw,
And trembling said, "Now, now at last
Surely her white arms will be cast
About my neck before them all;
Or at the worst her eyes will call
My feet to follow. Can it be
That she can bear my misery,
When of my heart she surely knows?"

And every day midmost the close
They met, and on the first day she
Did look upon him furtively
In loving wise; and through his heart
Love sent a pleasure-pointed dart—
A minute, and away she went,
And left him nowise more content
Than erst he had been.

The next day
Needs must she flush and turn away
Before their eyes met, and he stood
When she was gone in wretched mood,
Faint with desire.

The third hope came,
And then his hungry eyes, aflame
With longing wild, beheld her pass
As though amidst a dream she was;
Then e'en ere she had left the place
With his clenched hand he smote his face,
And void of everything but pain,
Through the thronged streets the sea did gain,
Not recking aught, and there at last
His body on the sand he cast,
Nigh the green waves, till in the end
Some thought the crushing cloud did rend,
And down the tears rushed from his eyes
For ruth of his own miseries;
And with the tears came thought again
To mingle with his formless pain

And hope withal—but yet more fear,
For he bethought him now that near
The time drew for his ship to sail.
Yet was the thought of some avail
To heal the unreason of his heart,
For now he needs must play a part
Wherein was something to be done,
If he would not be left alone
Life-long, with love unsatisfied.

So now he rose, and looking wide
Along the edges of the bay,
Saw where his fellows' tall ship lay
Anigh the haven, and a boat
'Twixt shore and ship-side did there float
With balanced oars; but on the shroud
A shipman stood, and shouted loud
Unto the boat—words lost, in sooth,
But which no less the trembling youth
Deemed certainly of him must be
And where he was; then suddenly
He turned, though none pursued, and fled
Along the sands, nor turned his head
Till round a headland he did reach
A long cove with a sandy beach;
Then looking landward he saw where
A streamlet cleft the sea-cliffs bare,
Making a little valley green,
Beset with thorn-trees; and between

The yellow strand and cliff's grey brow
Was built a cottage white and low
Within a little close, upon
The green slope that the stream had won
From rock and sea; and thereby stood
A fisher, whose grey homespun hood
Covered white locks: so presently
Acontius to that man drew nigh,
Because he seemed the man to be
Who told of that fair company,
Deeming that more might there be learned
About the flame wherewith he burned.

Withal he found it even so,
And that the old man him did know,
And greeted him, and fell to talk,
As such folk will of things that balk
The poor man's fortune, waves and winds,
And changing days and great men's minds;
And at the last it so befell
That this Acontius came to tell
A tale unto the man—how he
Was fain to 'scape the uneasy sea,
And those his fellows, and would give
Gold unto him, that he might live
In hiding there, till they had sailed.
Not strange it was if he prevailed
In few words, though the elder smiled
As not all utterly beguiled,

Nor curious therewithal to know
Such things as he cared not to show.

So there alone a while he dwelt,
And lonely there, all torment felt,
As still his longing grew and grew;
And ever as hot noontide drew
From dewy dawn and sunny morn,
He felt himself the most forlorn;
For then the best he pictured her:

"Now the noon wind, the scent-bearer,
Is busy midst her gown," he said,
"The fresh-plucked flowers about her head
Are drooping now with their desire;
The grass with unconsuming fire
Faints 'neath the pressure of her feet;
The honey-bees her lips would meet,
But fail for fear; the swift's bright eyes
Are eager round the mysteries
Of the fair hidden fragrant breast,
Where now alone may I know rest—
—Ah pity me, thou pityless!
Bless me who know'st not how to bless;
Fall from thy height, thou highest of all,
On me a very wretch to call!
Thou, to whom all things fate doth give,
Find without me thou canst not live!
Desire me, O thou world's desire,

Light thy pure heart at this base fire!
Save me, save me, thou knowest nought,
Of whom thou never hadst a thought!
O queen of all the world, stoop down,
Before my feet cast thou thy crown!
Speak to me, as I speak to thee!"

He walked beside the summer sea
As thus he spake, at eventide;
Across the waste of waters wide;
The dead sun's light a wonder cast,
That into grey night faded fast;
And ever as the shadows fell,
More formless grew the unbreaking swell
Far out to sea; more strange and white,
More vocal through the hushing night,
The narrow line of changing foam,
That 'twixt the sand and fishes' home
Writhed, driven onward by the tide—
—So slowly by the ocean's side
He paced, till dreamy passion grew;
The soft wind o'er the sea that blew,
Dried the cold tears upon his face,
Kindly if sad seemed that lone place,
Yea, in a while it scarce seemed lone,
When now at last the white moon shone
Upon the sea, and showed that still
It quivered, though a moveless hill
A little while ago it seemed.

So, turning homeward now, he dreamed
Of many a help and miracle
That in the olden time befell
Unto love's servants; e'en when he
Had clomb the hill anigh the sea,
And reached the hut now litten bright,
Not utterly with food and light
And common talk his dream passed by.
Yea, and with all this, presently
'Gan tell the old man when it was
That the great feast should come to pass
Unto Diana: Yea, and then
He, among all the sons of men,
E'en of that very love must speak;
Then grew Acontius faint and weak,
And his mouth twitched, and tears began
To pain his eyes; for the old man,
As one possessed, went on to tell
Of all the loveliness that well
Acontius wotted of, and now
For the first time he came to know
What name among her folk she had,
And, half in cruel pain, half glad,
He heard the old man say:
"Indeed
This sweet Cydippe hath great need
Of one to save her life from woe,
Because or ere the brook shall flow
Narrow with August 'twixt its banks,

Her folk, to win Diana's thanks,
Shall make her hers, and she shall be
Honoured of all folk certainly,
But unwed, shrunk as time goes on
Into a sour-hearted crone."

Acontius 'gan the room to pace
Ere he had done; with curious face
The old man gazed, but uttered nought;
Then in his heart Acontius thought,
"Ah when her image passeth by
Like a sweet breath, the blinded eye
Gains sight, the deaf man heareth well,
The dumb man lovesome tales can tell,
Hopes dead for long rise from their tombs,
The barren like a garden blooms;
And I alone—I sit and wait,
With deedless hands, on black-winged fate."

And so, when men had done with day,
Sleepless upon his bed he lay,
Striving to think if aught might move
Hard fate to give him his own love;
And thought of what would do belike,
And said, "Tomorrow will I strike
Before the iron groweth dull."
And so, with mind of strange things full,
Just at the dawn he fell asleep,
Yet as the shadows 'gan to creep

Up the long slope before the sun,
His blinking, troubled sleep was done;
And with a start he sat upright,
Now deeming that the glowing light
Was autumn's very sun, that all
Of ill had happed that could befall;
Yet fully waked up at the last,
From out the cottage-door he passed,
And saw how the old fisherman
His coble through the low surf ran
And shouted greeting from the sea;
Then 'neath an ancient apple-tree,
That on the little grassy slope
Stood speckled with the autumn's hope
He cast him down, and slept again;
And sleeping dreamed about his pain,
Yet in the same place seemed to be,
Beneath the ancient apple-tree.
So in his dream he heard a sound
Of singing fill the air around,
And yet saw nought; till in a while
The twinkling sea's uncounted smile
Was hidden by a rosy cloud,
That seemed some wondrous thing to shroud,
For in its midst a bright spot grew
Brighter and brighter, and still drew
Unto Acontius, till at last
A woman from amidst it passed,
And, wonderful in nakedness,

With rosy feet the grass did press,
And drew anigh; he durst not move
Or speak, because the Queen of Love
He deemed he knew; she smiled on him,
And, even as his dream waxed dim,
Upon the tree-trunk gnarled and grey
A slim hand for a while did lay;
Then all waxed dark, and then once more
He lay there as he lay before,
But all burnt up the green-sward was,
And songless did the throstle pass
'Twixt dark green leaf and golden fruit,
And at the old tree's knotted root
The basket of the gatherer
Lay, as though autumn-tide were there.
Then in his dream he thought he strove
To speak that sweet name of his love
Late learned, but could not; for away
Sleep passed, and now in sooth he lay
Awake within the shadow sweet,
The sunlight creeping o'er his feet.

Then he arose to think upon
The plans that he from night had won,
And still in each day found a flaw,
That night's half-dreaming eyes ne'er saw,
And far away all good hope seemed,
And the strange dream he late had dreamed
Of no account he made, but thought

That it had come and gone for nought.

And now the time went by till he
Knew that his keel had put to sea,
Yet after that a day or two
He waited, ere he dared to do
The thing he longed for most, and meet
His love within the garden sweet.
He saw her there, he saw a smile
The paleness of her face beguile
Before she saw him; then his heart
With pity and remorse 'gan smart;
But when at last she turned her head,
And he beheld the bright flush spread
Over her face, and once again
The pallor come, 'twixt joy and pain
His heart was torn; he turned away,
Thinking: "Long time ere that worst day
That unto her a misery
Will be, yea even as unto me,
And many a thing ere then may fall,
Or peaceful death may end it all."

The host that night his heart did bless
With praises of her loveliness
Once more, and said: "Yea, fools men are
Who work themselves such bitter care
That they may live when they are dead;
Her mother's stern cold hardihead

Shall make this sweet but dead-alive;
For who in all the world shall strive
With such an oath as she shall make?'

Acontius, for self-pity's sake,
Must steal forth to the night to cry
Some wordless prayer of agony;
And yet, when he was come again,
Of more of such-like speech was fain,
And needs must stammer forth some word,
That once more the old fisher stirred
To speech; who now began to tell
Tales of that oath as things known well,
To wise men from the days of old,
Of how a mere chance-word would hold
Some poor wretch as a life-long slave;
Nay, or the very wind that drave
Some garment's hem, some lock of hair
Against the dreadful altar there,
Had turned a whole sweet life to ill;
So heedfully must all fulfil
Their vows unto the dreadful maid.
Acontius heard the words he said
As through a thin sleep fraught with dreams,
Yet afterward would fleeting gleams
Of what the old man said confuse
His weary heart, that ne'er was loose
A minute from the bonds of love,
And still of all, strange dreams he wove.

So the time passed; a brooding life
That with his love might hold no strife
Acontius led; he did not spare
With torment vain his soul to tear
By meeting her in that same place:
No fickle hope now changed her face,
No hot desire therein did burn,
Rather it seemed her heart did yearn
With constant sorrow, and such love
As surely might the hard world move.
—Ah! shall it? Love shall go its ways,
And sometimes gather useless praise
From joyful hearts, when now at rest
The lover lies, but oftenest
To hate thereby the world is moved,
But oftenest the well-beloved
Shall pay the kiss back with a blow,
Shall smile to see the hot tears flow,
Shall answer with scarce-hidden scorn
The bitter words by anguish torn
From such a heart, as fain would rest
Silent until death brings the best.

So drew the time on to the day
When all hope must be cast away;
Late summer now was come, and still
As heeding neither good or ill
Of living men, the stream ran down
The green slope to the sea-side brown,

Singing its changeless song; still there
Acontius dwelt 'twixt slope-side fair
And changing murmur of the sea.

The night before all misery
Should be accomplished, red-eyed, wan,
He gave unto the ancient man
What wealth he had, and bade farewell
In such a voice as tale doth tell
Unto the wise; then to his bed
He crept, and still his weary head
Tossed on the pillow, till the dawn
The fruitful mist from earth had drawn.
Once more with coming light he slept,
Once more from out his bed he leapt,
Thinking that he had slept too fast,
And that all hope was over-past;
And with that thought he knew indeed
How good is hope to man at need,
Yea, even the least ray thereof.
Then dizzy with the pain of love
He went from out the door, and stood
Silent within the fruitful rood.
Still was the sunny morn and fair,
A scented haze was in the air;
So soft it was, it seemed as spring
Had come once more her arms to fling
About the dying year, and kiss
The lost world into dreams of bliss.

Now 'neath the tree he sank adown,
Parched was the sward thereby and brown,
Save where about the knotted root
A green place spread. The golden fruit
Hung on the boughs, lay on the ground;
The spring-born thrushes lurked around,
But sang not, yet the stream sang well,
And gentle tales the sea could tell.
Ere sunrise was the fisher gone,
And now his brown-sailed boat alone,
Some league or so from off the shore,
Moved slowly 'neath the sweeping oar.
So soothed by sights and sounds that day,
Sore weary, soon Acontius lay
In deep sleep as he erst had done,
And dreamed once more, nor yet had gone
E'en this time from that spot of ground;
And once more dreaming heard the sound
Of unseen singers, and once more
A pink-tinged cloud spread thwart the shore,
And a vague memory touched him now
Amid his sleep; his knitted brow
'Gan to unfold, a happy smile
His long love-languor did beguile
As from the cloud the naked one
Came smiling forth—but not alone;
For now the image of his love,
Clad like the murmuring summer dove,
She held by the slim trembling hand,

And soon he deemed the twain did stand
Anigh his head. Round Venus' feet
Outbroke the changing spring-flowers sweet
From the parched earth of autumn-tide;
The long locks round her naked side
The sea-wind drave; lily and rose,
Plucked from the heart of her own close,
Were girdle to her, and did cling,
Mixed with some marvellous golden thing,
About her neck and bosom white,
Sweeter than their shortlived delight.
And all the while, with eyes that bliss
Changed not, her doves brushed past to kiss
The marvel of her limbs; yet strange,
With loveliness that knows no change,
Fair beyond words as she might be,
Seemed it by love's mystery
That open-mouthed Acontius lay
In that sweet dream, nor drew away
His eyes from his love's pitying eyes;
And at the last he strove to rise,
And dreamed that touch of hand in hand
Made his heart faint; alas! the band
Of soft sleep, overstrained therewith,
Snapped short, and left him there to writhe
In helpless woe.

Yet in a while
Strange thoughts anew did him beguile;
Well-nigh he dreamed again, and saw

The naked goddess toward him draw,
Until the sunshine touched his face,
And stark awake in that same place
He sighed, and rose unto his knee,
And saw beneath the ancient tree,
Close by his hand, an apple lie,
Great, smooth, and golden. Dreamily
He turned it o'er, and in like mood
A long sharp thorn, as red as blood,
He took into his hand, and then,
In language of the Grecian men,
Slowly upon its side he wrote,
As one who thereof took no note,
Acontius will I wed to-day;
Then stealthily across the bay
He glanced, and trembling gat him down
With hurried steps unto the town,
Where for the high-tide folk were dight,
And all looked joyous there and bright,
As toward the fane their steps they bent.
And thither, too, Acontius went,
Scarce knowing if on earth or air
His feet were set; he coming there,
Gat nigh the altar standing-place,
And there with haggard eyes 'gan gaze
Upon the image of the maid
Whose wrath makes man and beast afraid.

So in a while the rites began,
And many a warrior and great man

Served the hard-hearted one, until
Of everything she had her fill
That Gods desire; and, trembling now,
Acontius heard the curved horns blow
That heralded the damsels' band;
And scarce for faintness might he stand,
When now, the minstrels' gowns of gold
Being past, he could withal behold
White raiment fluttering, and he saw
The fellows of his own love draw
Unto the altar; here and there
The mothers of those maidens fair
Went by them, proud belike, and fain
To note the honour they should gain.

Now scarce with hungry eyes might he
Gaze on those fair folk steadily,
As one by one they passed by him;
His limbs shook, and his eyes did swim,
And if he heard the words they said,
As outstretched hand and humble head
Strengthened the trembling maiden's vow,
Nought of their meaning did he know—
—And still she came not—what was this?
Had the dull death of hope of bliss
Been her death too—ah, was she dead?
Or did she lie upon her bed,
With panting mouth and fixed bright eyes,
Waiting the new life's great surprise,
All longings past, amid the hush

Of life departing?

A great rush
Of fearful pain stopped all his blood
As thus he thought; a while he stood
Blinded and tottering, then the air
A great change on it seemed to bear,
A heavenly scent; and fear was gone,
Hope but a name; as if alone
Mid images of men he was,—
Alone with her who now did pass
With fluttering hem and light footfall
The corner of the precinct wall.
Time passed, she drew nigh to the place,
Where he was standing, and her face
Turned to him, and her steadfast eyes
Met his, with no more of surprise
Than if in words she had been told
That each the other should behold
E'en in such wise— Pale was she grown;
Her sweet breath, that an unheard moan
Seemed to her lover, scarce might win
Through her half-opened lips; most thin
The veil seemed 'twixt her mournful eyes,
And death's long-looked-for mysteries;
Frail were her blue-veined hands; her feet
The pink-tinged marble steps did meet
As though all will were gone from her.
There went a matron, tall and fair,
Noble to look on, by her side,

Like unto her, but for cold pride
And passing by of twenty years,
And all their putting back of tears;
Her mother, certes, and a glow
Of pleasure lit her stern face now
At what that day should see well done.

But now, as the long train swept on,
There on the last step of the fane
She stood, so loved, so loved in vain;
Her mother fallen aback from her,
Yet eager the first word to hear
Of that her dreadful oath—so nigh
Were misery to misery,
That each might hear the other's breath;
That they this side of fair hope's death
Might yet have clung breast unto breast,
And snatched from life a little rest,
And snatched a little joy from pain.

O weary hearts, shall all be vain,
Shall all be nought, this strife and love?
—Once more with slow foot did she move
Unto the last step, with no sound
Unto Acontius turning round,
Who spake not, but, as moved at last
By some kind God, the apple cast
Into her bosom's folds—once more
She stayed, while a great flush came o'er

Her sweet face erst half-dead and wan;
Then went a sound from man to man
So fair she seemed, and some withal
Failed not to note the apple fall
Into her breast.
Now while with fear
And hope Acontius trembled there
And to her side her mother came,
She cast aside both fear and shame
From out her noble heart, and laid
Upon the altar of the Maid
Her fair right hand, clasped firm around
The golden fruit, and with no sound
Her lips moved, and her eyes upraised
Upon the marble image gazed,
With such a fervour as if she
Would give the thing humanity
And love and pity—then a space
Unto her love she turned her face
All full of love, as if to say,
"So ends our trouble from to-day,
Either with happy life or death."

Yet anxious still, with held-back breath,
He saw her mother come to her
With troubled eyes. "What hast thou there?"
He heard her say. "Is the vow made?
I heard no word that thou hast said?"

Then through him did her sweet voice thrill:
"No word I spake for good or ill;
But this spake for me; so say ye
What oath in written words may be;
Although, indeed, I wrote them nought;
And in my heart had got no thought,
When first I came hereto this morn,
But here to swear myself forlorn
Of love and hope—because the days
Of life seemed but a weary maze,
Begun without leave asked of me,
Whose ending I might never see,
Or what came after them—but now
Backward my life I will not throw
Into your deep-dug, spice-strewn grave,
But either all things will I save
This day, or make an end of all."

Then silence on the place did fall;
With frowning face, yet hand that shook,
The fated fruit her mother took
From out her hand, and pale she grew,
When the few written words she knew,
And what they meant; but speedily
She brushed the holy altar by,
Unto the wondering priests to tell
What things there in their midst befell.

There, in low words, they spoke awhile,

How they must deal with such a guile,
Cast by the goddess of desire
Into the holy maiden's fire.
And to the priests it seemed withal,
That a full oath they needs must call
That writing on the altar laid:
Then, wroth and fearful, some there bade
To seek a death for these to die,
If even so they might put by
The maid's dread anger; crueller
They grew as still they gathered fear,
And shameful things the dusk fane heard,
As grey beard wagged against grey beard,
And fiercer grew the ancient eyes.

But from the crowd, meanwhile, did rise
Great murmuring, for from man to man
The rumour of the story ran,
I know not how; and therewithal
Some god-sent lovesome joy did fall
On all hearts there, until it seemed
That each one of his own soul dreamed,
Beloved, and loving well; and when
Some cried out that the ancient men
Had mind to slay the lovers there,
A fierce shout rent the autumn air:
"Nay, wed the twain; love willeth it!"
But silent did the elders sit,
With death and fear on either hand,

Till one said, "Fear not, the whole land,
Not we, take back what they did give;
With many scarce can one man strive;
Let be, themselves shall make amends."

"Yea, let be," said the next; "all ends,
Despite the talk of mortal men,
Who deem themselves undying, when,
Urged by some unknown God's commands,
They snatch at love with eager hands,
And gather death that grows thereby,
Yet swear that love shall never die—
Let be—in their own hearts they bear
The seeds of pangs to pierce and tear.
What need, White-armed, to follow them,
With well-strung bow and fluttering hem,
Adown the tangle of life's wood?
Thou knowest what the fates deem good
For wretches that love overmuch—
One mad desire for sight and touch;
One spot alone of all the earth
That seems to them of any worth;
One sound alone that they may bear
Amidst earth's joyful sounds to hear;
And sight, and sound, and dwelling-place,
And soft caressing of one face,
Forbidden, and forbidden still,
Or granted e'en for greater ill,
But for a while, that they may be

Sunk deeper into misery—
—Great things are granted unto those
That love not—far-off things brought close,
Things of great seeming brought to nought,
And miracles for them are wrought;
All earth and heaven lie underneath
The hand of him who wastes not breath
In striving for another's love,
In hoping one more heart to move.
—A light thing and a little thing,
Ye deem it, that two hearts should cling
Each unto each, till two are one,
And neither now can be alone?
O fools, who know not all has sworn
That those shall ever be forlorn
Who strive to bring this thing to pass—
So is it now, as so it was,
And so it shall be evermore,
Till the world's fashion is passed o'er."

White-bearded was the ancient man
Who spoke, with wrinkled face and wan;
But as unto the porch he turned
A red spot in his cheek there burned,
And his eyes glittered, for, behold!
Close by the altar's horns of gold,
There stood the weary ones at last,
Their arms about each other cast,
Twain no more now, they said—no more

What things soe'er fate had in store.
Careless of life, careless of death;
Now, when each felt the other's breath
On lip and cheek, and many a word
By all the world beside unheard,
Or heard and little understood,
Each spake to each, and all seemed good;
Yea, though amid the world's great wrong,
Their space of life should not be long;
O bitter sweet if they must die!
O sweet, too sweet, if time passed by,
If time made nought for them, should find
Their arms in such wise intertwined
Years hence, with no change drawing near!

Nor says the tale, nor might I hear,
That aught of evil on them fell.
Few folk there were but thought it well,
When saffron-robed, fair-wreathed, loose-haired
Cydippe through the city fared
Well won at last; when lingering shame
Somewhat upon the lovers came,
Now that all fear was quite bygone,
And yet they were not all alone;
Because from men the sun was fain
A little more of toil to gain,
Awhile in prison of his light,
To hold aback the close-lipped night.

SILENCE a little when the tale was told,
Soon broken by the merry-voiced and bold
Among the youths, though some belike were fain
For more of silence yet, that their sweet pain
Might be made sweeter still by hope and thought
Amid the words of the old story caught—
Might be made keener by the pensive eyes
That half-confessed love made so kind and wise;
Yet these too, mid the others, went their way,
To get them through the short October day
'Twixt toil and toilsome love, e'en as they might;
If so, perchance, the kind and silent night
Might yet reward their reverent love with dreams
Less full of care.

But round the must's red streams,
'Twixt the stripped vines the elders wandered slow,
And unto them, e'en as a soothing show
Was the hid longing, wild desire, blithe hope,
That seethed there on the tangled sun-worn slope
'Twixt noon and moonrise. Resolute were they
To let no pang of memory mar their day,
And long had fear, before the coming rest,
Been set aside. And so the changed west,
Forgotten of the sun, was grey with haze;
The moon was high and bright, when through the maze

Of draggled tendrils back at last they turned,
And red the lights within the fair house burned
Through the grey night; strained string, and measured
voice
Of minstrels, mingled with the varying noise
Of those who through the deep-cut misty roads
Went slowly homeward now to their abodes.
A short space more of that short space was gone,
Wherein each deemed himself not quite alone.

IN late October, when the failing year
But little pleasure more for men might bear,
They sat within the city's great guest-hall,
Nigh enow to the sea to hear the fall
Of the low haven-waves when night was still.
But on that day wild wind and rain did fill
The earth and sea with clamour, and the street
Held few who cared the driving scud to meet.
But inside, as a little world it was,
Peaceful amid the hubbub that did pass
Its strong walls in untiring waves of rage,
With the earth's intercourse wild war to wage.
Bright glowed the fires, and cheerier their light
Fell on the gold that made the fair place bright
Of roof and wall, for all the outside din.
Yet of the world's woe somewhat was within
The noble compass of its walls, for there
Were histories of great striving painted fair,
Striving with love and hate, with life and death,
With hope that lies, and fear that threateneth.
And so mid varied talk the day went by,
As such days will, not quite unhappily,
Not quite a burden, till the evening came
With lulling of the storm: and little blame
The dark had for the dull day's death, when now

The good things of the hall were set aglow
By the great tapers. Midmost of the board
Sat Rolf, the captain, who took up the word.
And said :
"Fair fellows, a strange tale is this,
Heard and forgotten midst my childish bliss,
Little remembered midst the change and strife,
Come back again this latter end of life,
I know not why ; yet as a picture done
For my delight, I see my father's son,
My father with the white cloth on his knees,
Beaker in hand, amid the orange-trees
At Micklegarth, and the high-hatted man
Over 'gainst him, with his visage wan,
Black beard, bright eyes, and thin composed hands,
Telling this story of the fiery lands."

THE
MAN WHO NEVER LAUGHED AGAIN.

ARGUMENT.

A CERTAIN man, who from rich had become poor, having been taken by one of his former friends to a fair house, was shown strange things there, and dwelt there awhile among a company of doleful men; but these in the end dying, and he desiring above all things to know their story, so it happened that he at last learned it to his own cost.

A CITY was there nigh the Indian Sea,
As tells my tale, where folk for many an age
Had lived, perforce, such life as needs must be
Beneath the rule of priestly king and mage,
Bearing with patient hearts the summer's rage,
Yea, even bowing foolish heads in vain
Before the mighty sun, their life and bane.

Now ere the hottest of the summer came,
While yet the rose shed perfume on the earth,
And still the grass was green despite the flame
Of that land's sun—while folk gave up to mirth
A little of their life, so little worth,

And the rich man forgot his fears awhile
Beneath the soft eve's still recurring smile—

Mid those sweet days, when e'en the burning land
Knew somewhat of the green north's summer rest,
A stately house within the town did stand,
When the fresh morn was falling from its best,
Though the street's pavement still the shadow blessed
From whispering trees, that rose, thick-leaved and tall,
Above the well-built marble bounding-wall.

Each side the door therein rose-garlands hung.
And through the doorway you might see within
The glittering robes of minstrel-men that sung,
And resting dancing-girls in raiment thin,
Because the master there did now begin
Another day of ease and revelry,
To make it harder yet for him to die.

And toward the door, perfumed and garlanded,
The guests passed, clad in wonderful attire,
And this and that one through the archway led
Some girl, made languid by the rosy fire
Of that fair time; with love and sweet desire
The air seemed filled, and how could such folk see
In any eyes unspoken misery?

Yet 'gainst the marble wall, anigh the door,
A man leaned, gazing at the passers-by,

Who, young, was clad in wretched clothes and poor,
And whose pale face, grown thin with misery,
Told truthful stories of his end anigh,
For such a one was he as rich men fear,
Friendless and poor, nor taught hard toil to bear;

And some in passing by that woeful man
A little time indeed their loud talk stayed
To gaze upon his haggard face and wan,
Some even, their hands upon their pouches laid,
But all passed on again, as if afraid
That, e'en in giving thanks for unasked gift,
His dolorous voice their veil of joy would lift.

He asked for nought, nor did his weary eyes
Meet theirs at all, until there came at last,
On a white mule, and clad in noble guise,
A lonely man, who by the poor wretch passed,
And, passing, on his face a side-glance cast,
Then o'er his shoulder eyed him, then drew rein
And turned about, and came to him again;

And said, "Thou hast the face of one I knew,
Men called the Golden One, in such a town,
Because they deemed his wealth for ever grew,
E'en in such times as beats the richest down;
What stroke of hapless fate, then, hast thou known
That thou hast come to such a state as this,
To which the poorest peasant's would be bliss?"

The other raised his eyes, and stared awhile
Into the speaker's face, as one who draws
His soul from dreams, then with a bitter smile
He said, "Firuz, thou askest of the cause
Of this my death? I knew not the world's laws,
But 'give today, and take tomorrow-morn,'
I needs must say, holding the wise in scorn.

"For even as with gifts contempt I bought,
So knowledge buys disease, power loneliness,
And honour fear, and pleasure pains unsought,
And friendship anxious days of great distress,
And love the hate of what we used to bless—
Ah, I am wise, and wiser soon shall grow,
And know the most that wise dead men can know.

"What shall I say? thou knowest the old tale;
I gave, I spent, and then I asked in vain,
And when I fell, my hands could scarce avail
For any work; at last, worse woe to gain,
I fled from folk who knew my present pain
And ancient pleasure—'midst strange men I wait,
In this strange town, the last new jest of fate.

"But since we talk of such-like merchandize,
What gift has bought for thee an equal curse?
Because, indeed, I deem by this thy guise
Thou hast not reached the bottom of thy purse;
Therefore, perchance, thy face seems something worse

Than mine, for I shall die, but thou must live,
More laughter yet unto the Gods to give?"

Nor did he speak these words unwarranted,
For in the other's face those signs there were
That mark the soul wherein all hope is dead;
While, with the new-born image of despair
The first man played, and found life even there,
Changeless his old friend's face was grown, and he
Had no more eyes things new or strange to see.

He said, "Then hast thou still a wish on earth;
Come now with me, if thou wouldst know my fate:
Thou yet mayst win again that time of mirth
When every day was as a flowery gate
Through which we passed to joy, importunate
To win us from the thought of yesterday,
In whatso pleasures it had passed away!"

"Great things thou promisest," the other said,
"And yet indeed since I have feared to die,
Though well I know that I were better dead,
The life thou givest me I yet will try;
It will not be so long in passing by,
If it must be such life as thou hast shared—
Yet thanks to thee who thus for me hast cared."

"Friend," said he, "in thine hand thy life thou hast,
If thou hast told me all that grieveth thee,

And unto thee the past may well be past,
And days not wholly bad thou yet mayst see;
And if indeed thy first felicity
Thou winnest not, yet something shalt thou have
Thy soul from death, or loathed life, to save.

"And for thy thanks, something I deem I owe
To our old friendship, could I mind it aught,
And well it is that I should pay it now
While yet I have a little wavering thought
Of things without me: neither have I brought
A poisoned life to give to thee today,
Or such a life as I have cast away."

"Nay," said he, "let all be since I must live,
I will not think of how to play my part:
And now some food to me thou needs must give,
For wretched hunger gnaweth at my heart.
Take heed withal that old desires will start
Up to the light since first I heard thee speak,
Wretched as now I am, and pined and weak."

Firuz thenceforward scarcely seemed to heed
What words he said, but as a man well taught
To do some dull task, set himself to lead
That man unto an hostel, where they brought
Food unto him, and raiment richly wrought;
Then he being mounted on a mule, the twain
Set out therefrom some new abode to gain.

NOW cheered by food, and hope at least of ease,
Perchance of something more, as on they went
Betwixt the thronged streets and the palaces,
No more did Bharam keep his head down bent,
Rather from right to left quick glances sent,
And though his old complaints he murmured still,
He scarcely thought his life so lost and ill.

But for his fellow, worse he seemed to be
Than e'en before, his thin face pinched and grey,
Seemed sunk yet deeper into misery,
Nor did he lift his eyes from off the way,
Nor heed what things his friend to him might say,
But plodded on till they were past the town,
When now the fiery sun was falling down.

Then by the farms and fields they went, until
All tillage and smooth ways were left behind,
And half-way up a bare and rugged hill
They entered a rude forest close and blind,
And many a tale perforce seized Bharam's mind
Of lonely men by fiends bewildered,
So like his fellow looked to one long dead.

But now, as careless what might hap to him,
He 'gan to sing of roses and delight

Some snatch, until the wood that had been dim,
E'en in broad day, grew black with coming night;
Then lower sank his song, and dropped outright,
When on his rein he felt his guide's hand fall,
And still they pierced that blackness like a wall.

Thus on the little-beaten forest-soil
They went, with nought to see, and nought to hear
Except their mules' unceasing, patient toil:
But full the darkness seemed of forms of fear,
And like long histories passed the minutes drear
To Bharam's o'erwrought mind expecting death,
And like a challenge seemed his lowest breath.

How long they went he knew not, but at last
Upon his face he felt a doubtful breeze,
Quickening his soul, and onward as they passed
A feeble glimmer showed betwixt the trees,
And his eyes, used to darkness, by degrees
Could dimly see his fellow, and the way
Whereon they rode to some unearthly day.

Then as the boughs grew thinner overhead,
That glimmer widened into moonlit night,
And 'twixt the trees grown sparse their pathway led
Unto a wide bare plain, that 'neath that light
Against the black trunks showed all stark and white;
Then Bharam, more at ease thereat, began
His fellow's visage in that light to scan.

No change was in his face, and if he knew
Who rode beside him, 'twas but as some hook
Within an engine knows what it must do,
His hand indeed from his friend's rein he took,
But never cast on him one slightest look;
Then, shuddering, Bharam 'gan to sing again
To make him turn, but spent his breath in vain.

But when the trees were wholly past, afar
Across the plain they saw a watch-tower high,
That 'neath the moonlight, like an angry star,
Shone over a white palace, and thereby
Within white walls did black-treed gardens lie:
And Firuz smote his mule and hastened on
To where that distant sign of trouble shone.

And as they went, thereon did Bharam stare,
Nor turned his eyes at all unto the plain,
Nor heeded when from out her form the hare
Started beneath the mule's feet, and in vain
The owl called from the wood, for he drew rein
Within a little while before the gate,
Casting his soul into the hands of fate.

Then Firuz blew the horn, nor waited long
Ere the gate, opened by a man scarce seen,
Gave entry to a garden, where the song
Of May's brown bird had hardly left the green
Sweet-blossomed tree-tops lonely, and between

The whispering glades the fountain leaped on high,
And the rose waited till morn came, to die.

But when the first wave of that soft delight
Swept o'er the spendthrift's sense, he smiled and
turned
Unto his guide throughout the wondrous night,
And while his heart with hope and wonder burned,
He said, "Indeed a fair thing have I learned
With thee for master; yet is this the end?
Will they not now bring forth the bride, O friend?"

Drunk with the sweetness of that place he spoke,
And hoped to see the mask fall suddenly
From his friend's face, from whose thin lips there
broke
A dreadful cry of helpless misery,
Scaring the birds from flowery bush and tree;
"O fool!" he said; "say such things in the day,
When noise and light take memory more away!"

Bharam shrank back abashed, nor had a word
To say thereto, and 'twixt the trees they rode,
Noted of nothing but some wakeful bird,
Until they reached a fair and great abode
Whereon the red gold e'en in moonlight glowed.
There silently they lighted down before
Smooth marble stairs, and through the open door

They entered a great, dimly-lighted hall;
Yet through the dimness well our man could see
How fair the hangings were that clad the wall,
And what a wealth of beast and flower and tree
Was spent wherever carving there might be,
And what a floor was 'neath his wearied feet,
Not made for men who call death rest and sweet.

Now he, though fain to linger and to ask
What was the manner of their living there,
And what thenceforth should be his proper task,
And who his fellows were, did nowise dare
To meet that cry again that seemed to bare
A wretched life of every softening veil—
A dreadful prelude to a dreadful tale.

So silently whereas the other led
He followed, and through corridors they passed,
Dim lit, but worthy of a king new wed,
Till to a chamber did they come at last,
O'er which a little light a taper cast,
And showed a fair bed by the window-side;
Therewith at last turned round the dreary guide,

And said, "O thou to whom night still is night
And day is day, bide here until the morn,
And take some little of that dear delight,
That we for many a long day have outworn.
Sleep, and forget awhile that thou wast born,

And on the morrow will I come to thee
To show thee what thy life with us must be."

And with that word he went, and though at first
The other thought that he should never sleep
For wondering what had made that house accursed,
And sunk that seeming bliss in woe so deep,
Yet o'er his soul forgetfulness did creep,
And in a dreamless slumber long he lay,
Not knowing when the sun brought back the day.

But in broad daylight of the following morn
He woke, and o'er him saw his fellow stand,
Who seemed, if it could be, yet more forlorn
Than when he last reached out to him his hand.
But now he said, "Come thou and see the band
Of folk that thou shalt dwell with, and the home
Whereto, fate leading thee, thou now hast come."

He rose without a word, and went with him
Who led the way through pillared passages,
Dainty with marble walls, made cool and dim
By the o'erhanging boughs of thick-leaved trees
That brushed against their windows in the breeze,
And still the work of one all seemed to be
Who had a mind to mock eternity.

Too lovely seemed that place for any one
But youths and damsels, who, not growing old,

Should dwell there, knowing not the scorching sun,
Without a name for misery or cold,
Without a use for glittering steel or gold
Except adornment, and content withal,
Though change or passion there should ne'er befall.

And still despite his fellow's woeful face,
And that sad cry that smote him yesternight,
The strange luxurious perfume of that place,
Where everything seemed wrought for mere delight,
Still made his heart beat, and his eyes wax bright
With delicate desires new-born again,
In that sweet rest from poverty and pain.

And, looking through the windows there askance,
He yet had something like a hope to see
The garden blossom into feast and dance,
Or, turning round a corner suddenly,
Mid voices sweet, and perfumed gowns to be
Bewildered by white limbs and glittering eyes,
Striving to learn love's inmost mysteries.

But as they went, unto a door they came
That Firuz opened, showing a great hall
Whose walls with wealth of strange-wrought gold did flame
Through a cool twilight, for the light did fall
From windows in the dome high up and small,
And Bharam's lustful hope was quenched in fear,
As he, low moaning and faint sobs could hear.

He stopped and shut his eyes, oppressed with awe,
Thinking the rites of some sad god to see—
The secrets of some blood-stained hidden law—
But Firuz grasped his arm impatiently,
And drew him in. "O friend, look up!" said he,
"Nought dwelleth here but man's accursed race,
And thou art far the mightiest in this place."

Then he, though trembling still, looked up, and there
Beheld six men clad even as his guide,
Who sat upon a bench of marble fair
Against the wall, and some their eyes must hide
When they met his, and some rose up and cried
Words inarticulate, then sank again
Into their places, as out-worn with pain.

But one against the wall, with head back thrown,
Was leaning, and his eyes wide open stared,
And by his side his nerveless hands hung down,
Nor showed his face a glimmer of surprise,
Deaf was he to the wisest of the wise,
Speechless though open-mouthed; for there sat he,
Dead midst the living slaves of misery.

Bharam stared at him, wondering, still in dread;
But no heed took his fellows of his case,
Till Firuz, with a side-glance at him, said,
"Why mourn ye more that yet another face
Must see our shame and sorrow in this place?

Do ye not know this worldly man is come
To lay the last one of us in his home?

"And now in turn another soul is gone,
Get ready then to bear him forth straightway.
Be patient, for the heavy days craw[1] on!
But thou, O friend, I pray thee from this day
Help thou us helpless men, who cannot pray
Even to die; no long time will it be
Ere we shall leave this countless wealth to thee.

"Behold, a master, not a slave, we need,
For we, I say, have neither will to die
Nor yet to live, yet will we pay good heed
To thy commands, still doing patiently
Our daily tasks, as the dull time goes by;
Drive us like beasts, yea, slay us if thou wilt,
Nor will our souls impute to thee the guilt.

"Yet ask us not to tell thee of our tale,
Why we are brought unto this sad estate,
Nor for the rest will any words avail
To make us flee from this lone house, where fate
With all its cruel sport will we await;
Lo, now thy task, O fellow, in return
A mighty kingdom's wealth thou soon shalt earn."

Now as he spoke, a hard forgetfulness
Of his own lot, the rich man's cruel pride,

Smote Bharam's heart, he thought, "What dire distress
Could make me cast all hope of life aside?
Could aught but death my life and will divide?
Surely this mood of theirs will pass away
And these walls yet may see a merry day."

So thought he, yet, beholding them again,
And seeing them so swallowed up with woe
That they scarce heeded him, a pang of pain
Like pleasure's death throughout his heart did go;
And therewithal a strong desire to know
The utmost of their tale possessed his mind
And made him scorn an easy life and blind.

So midst his silence neither spoke they aught:
Firuz himself, as one, who having laid
His charge upon another, may take thought
Of his own miseries, sat with head downweighed,
With tears that would not flow; then Bharam said,
"Masters, I bid you rise and do your best
To give your fellow's body its due rest!"

They rose up at his words and straight began,
As men who oft had had such things to do,
To dress the body of the just-dead man
For his last resting-place, then two and two
They bore it forth, passing the chambers through,
Where Bharam on that morn had hoped to see
Fair folk that had no name for misery.

Then through the sunny pleasance slow they passed.
That sweet with flowers behind the palace lay,
Until they reached a thick, black wood at last,
Bounding the garden as the night bounds day,
And through a narrow path they took their way,
Less like to men than shadows in a dream,
Till the wood ended at a swift broad stream,

Beneath the boughs dark green it ran, and deep,
Well-nigh awash with the wood's tangled grass,
But on the other side wall-like and steep,
Straight from the gurgling eddies, rose a mass
Of dark grey cliff, no man unhelped could pass;
But a low door e'en in the very base
Was set, above the water's hurrying race.

Of iron seemed that door to Bharam's eyes,
Heavily wrought, and closely locked it seemed;
But as he stared thereon strange thoughts would rise
Within his heart, until he well-nigh deemed
That he in morning sleep of such things dreamed,
And dreamed that he had seen all this before,
Wood and deep river, cliff, and close-shut door.

But in the stream, and close unto his feet,
A boat there lay, as though for wafting o'er
Whoso had will such doubtful things to meet
As that strange door might hide; and on the shore,
About the path, a rod of ground or more

Was cleared of wood, in which space here and there
Low changing mounds told of dead men anear.

So there that doleful company made stay,
And 'twixt the trees and swift stream hurrying by,
Their brother's body in the earth did lay.
Nor ever to the cliff would raise an eye,
But trembling, as with added agony,
Did their dull task as swiftly as they could,
Then went their way again amidst the wood.

NOW with these dreary folk must Bharam live
Henceforward, doing even as he would;
And many a joy the palace had to give
To such a man as e'en could find life good
So prisoned, and with nought to stir the blood,
And seeing still from weary day to day
These wretched mourners cast their lives away.

Yet came deliverance; one by one they died,
E'en as new-come he saw that man die first,
And so were buried by the river-side.
And ever as he saw these men accurst
Vanish from life, he grew the more athirst
To know what evil deed had been their bane,
But still were all his prayers therefor in vain.

His utmost will in all things else they did,
Serving as slaves if he demanded aught,
But in grim silence still their story hid;
Nor did he fare the better when he sought
In the fair parchments that scribes' hands had wrought
Within that house. Of many a tale they told;
But none the tale of that sad life did hold.

Therefore in silence he consumed his days
Until a weary year had clean gone by
Since first upon that palace he did gaze,
And all that doleful band had he seen die,
Except Firuz; and ever eagerly
Did Bharam watch him, lest he too should go,
And make an end of all he longed to know.

At last a day came when the mourner said,
"Beneath the ground my woe thou soon shalt lay,
And all our foolish sorrow shall be dead;
Come then, I fain would show thee the straight way
Through which we came the night of that passed day
When first I brought thee here. This knowledge thine,
Guard thou this house, and use it as a mine;

"While safe thou dwellest in some city fair,—
Hasten, for little strength is in me now!"
But Bharam thought, "Yet will he not lay bare
His story to me utterly, and show
What thing it was that brought these men so low."

Yet said he nought, but from the house they went,
While painfully the mourner on him leant.

So, the wood gained, by many glades they passed
That Firuz heeded not, though they were wide,
Until they reached a certain one at last,
Whereon he said, "Here did we come that tide;
I counsel thee no longer to abide
When I am dead, but mount my mule and go,
Nor doubt the beast the doubtful way shall know.

"She too shall serve thee when thou com'st again,
With many men, and sumpter mules enow
To gather up the wealth we held in vain,—
Turn me, I would depart! fainter I grow!
And thou the road to happy life dost know.
Alas, my feet are heavy! nor can I
Go any further. Lay me down to die!"

Then 'gainst a tree-root Bharam laid his head,
Saying, "Fear not, thou hast been good to me,
And by the river-side, when thou art dead,
I will not fail to lay thee certainly!"
"Nay, nay," he said, "what matter—let it be!
I bring the dismal rite unto an end.
Hide my bones here, and toward thy city wend!

"Better perchance that thou beholdest not
That place once more, our misery and bane!"

Then at that word did Bharam's heart wax hot;
He seemed at point his whole desire to gain.
He cried aloud, "Nay, surely all in vain
Thy secret hast thou hidden till this day,
Since to the mystic road thou showest the way!"

"My will is weak," his friend said, "thine is strong;
Draw near, and I will tell thee all the tale,
If this my feeble voice will last so long.
Perchance my dying words may yet avail
To make thee wise. This pouch of golden scale,
Open thou it. The gold key hid therein
Opens the story of our foolish sin.

"How thy face flushes, holding it! Just so,
As by that door I stood, did my face burn
That summer morning past so long ago.
Draw nigher still if thou the tale wouldst learn.
I scarce can speak now, and withal I yearn
To die at last, and leave the thing unsaid.
Raise thou me up, or I shall soon be dead!"

His fellow raised him trembling, nor durst speak
Lest he should scare his feeble life away,
Then from his mouth came wailing words, and weak:
"Where art thou then, O loveliest one, to-day?
Beneath the odorous boughs that gladden May,
Laid in the thymy hollow of some hill,
Dost thou remember me a little still?

"Can kindness such as thine was, vanish quite
And be forgotten? Ah, if I forget,
Canst thou forget the love and fresh delight
That held thee then—my love that even yet
Midst other love must make thy sweet eyes wet,
At least sometimes, at least when heaven and earth
In some fair eve are grown too fair for mirth?

"O joy departed, know'st thou how at first
I prayed in vain, and strove with hope to dull
My ravening hunger, mock my quenchless thirst?
And know'st thou not how when my life was full
Of nought but pain, I strove asleep to lull
My longing for the eyeless, hopeless rest,
Lest even yet strange chance should bring the best?

"Farewell, farewell, beloved! I depart,
But hope, once dead, now liveth though I die,
Whispering of marvels to my fainting heart—
Perchance the memory of some written lie,
Perchance the music of the rest anigh;
I know not—but farewell, be no more sad!
For life and love that has been, I am glad."

He ceased, and his friend, trembling, faintly said—
"Wilt thou not speak to me, what hast thou done?"
But even as he spoke, the mourner's head
Fell backward, and his troubled soul was gone;
And Bharam, in the forest left alone,

Durst scarcely move at first for very fear,
And longing for the tale he was to hear.

But in a while the body down he laid,
And swiftly gat him o'er the hot dry plain,
And through the garden, as a man afraid,
Went softly, and the golden porch did gain,
And from the wealth those men had held in vain,
Most precious things he did not spare to take
For his new life and joyous freedom's sake.

So doing he came round unto the door
That led out to the passage through the wood,
Wherethrough the mourners erst their dead ones bore
Down to the river; but as there he stood
He felt a new fire kindling in his blood;
His sack he laid aside, and touched the key
That could unlock that dreadful history;

And his friend's words, that loving tender voice
He sent forth ere he died, smote on his heart:
How could he leave those dead men and rejoice
With folk who in their story had no part?
Yea, as he lingered did the hot tears start
Into his eyes, he wept, and knew not why;
Some pleasure seemed within his grasp to lie,

He could not grasp or name, and none the less
He muttered to himself, "I must be gone

Or I shall die in this fair wilderness,
That every minute seems to grow more lone;
Why do I stand here like a man of stone?"
And with that very word he moved indeed,
But took the path that toward the stream did lead.

Quickly he walked with pale face downward bent,
As 'twixt the trembling tulip-beds he passed,
Until a horror seized him as he went,
And, turning toward the house, he ran full fast,
Nor, till he reached it, one look backward cast;
And by the gathered treasure, left behind
Awhile ago, he stood confused, half blind.

Then slowly did he lift the precious weight,
Yet lingered still. "Ah, must I go?" he said,
"Have I no heart to meet that unknown fate?
And must I lead the life that once I led,
Midst folk who will rejoice when I am dead;
Even as if they had not shared with me
The fear and longing of felicity?

"And yet indeed if I must live alone,
If fellowship is but an empty dream,
Is there not left a world that is mine own?
Am I not real, if all else doth but seem?
Yea, rather, with what wealth the world doth teem,
When we are once content from us to cast
The dreadful future and remorseful past."

A little while he lingered yet, and then
As fearful what he might be tempted to,
He hurried on until he reached again
The outer door, and, sighing, passed therethrough,
But still made haste to do what he must do,
And found the mule and cast on her the sack,
And took his way to that lone forest-track.

Mattock and spade with him too did he bear,
And dug a grave beneath the spreading tree
Whereby Firuz had died, and laid him there,
Thinking the while of all his misery,
And muttering still, "How could it hap to me?
Unless I died within a day or two
Surely some deed I soon should find to do."

But when the earth on him he 'gan to throw,
He said, "And shall I cast the key herein?
What need have I this woeful tale to know,
To vex me midst the fair life I shall win;
Why do I seek to probe my fellow's sin,
Who, living, saved my life from misery,
And dying, gave this fresh life unto me?"

He kept the key, his words he answered not,
But smoothed the earth above the mourner's head,
Then mounting, turned away from that sad spot,
Feverish with hope and change, bewildered,
And ever more oppressed with growing dread,

As through the dark and silent wood he rode,
And drew the nigher unto man's abode.

But when at last he met the broad sweet light
Upon the hill's brow where that wood had end,
And saw the open upland fresh and bright,
A thrill of joy that sight through him must send,
And with good heart he 'twixt the fields did wend,
And not so much of that sad house he thought
As of the wealthy life he thence had brought;

So amidst thoughts of pleasant life and ease,
Seemed all things fair that eve; the peasant's door,
The mother with the child upon her knees
Sitting within upon the shaded floor;
While 'neath the trellised gourd some maid sung o'er
Her lover to the rude lute's trembling strings,
Her brown breast heaving 'neath the silver rings;

The slender damsel coming from the well,
Smiling beneath the flashing brazen jar,
Her fellows left behind thereat, to tell
How weary of her smiles her lovers are;
While the small children round wage watery war
Till the thin linen more transparent grows,
And ruddy brown the flesh beneath it glows;

The trooper drinking at the homestead gate,
Telling wild lies about the sword and spear,

Unto the farmer striving to abate
The pedler's price; the village drawing near,
The smoke, that scenting the fresh eve, and clear,
Tells of the feast; the stithy's dying spark,
The barn's wealth dimly showing through the dark.

How sweet was all! how easy it should be
Amid such life one's self-made woes to bear!
He felt as one who, waked up suddenly
To life's delight, knows not of grief or care.
How kind, how lovesome, all the people were!
Why should he think of aught but love and bliss
With many years of such-like life as this?

Night came at last, and darker and more still
The world was, and the stars hung in the sky,
And as the road o'ertopped a sunburnt hill
He saw before him the great city lie,
The glimmering lights about grey towers and high,
Rising from gardens dark; the guarded wall,
The gleaming dykes, the great sea, bounding all.

As one who at the trumpet's sound casts by
The tender thought of rest, of wife and child,
And fear of death for hope of victory,
So at that sight those sweet vague hopes and wild
Did he cast by, and in the darkness smiled
For pleasure of the beauty of the earth,
For foretaste of the coming days of mirth.

SURELY if any man was blithe and glad
Within that city, when the morrow's sun
Beheld it, he at least the first place had,
And midst of glad folk was the happiest one—
So much to do, that was not e'en begun,
So much to hope for, that he could not see,
So much to win, so many things to be!

Yea, so much, he could turn himself to nought
For many days, but wandering aimlessly
Wherever men together might be brought,
That he once more their daily life might see,
That to his new-born life new seemed to be,
And staving thought off, he awhile must shrink
From touching that sweet cup he had to drink.

Yet when this mood was past by, what was this,
That in the draught he was about to drain,
That new victorious life, all seemed amiss?
If, thinking of the pleasure and the pain,
Men find in struggling life, he turned to gain
The godlike joy he hoped to find therein,
All turned to cloud, and nought seemed left to win.

Love moved him not, yea, something in his heart
There was that made him shudder at its name;

He could not rouse himself to take his part
In ruling worlds and winning praise and blame;
And if vague hope of glory o'er him came,
Why should he cast himself against the spears
To make vain stories for the unpitying years?

The thing that men call knowledge moved him not,
And if he thought of the world's varying face,
And changing manners, then his heart waxed hot
For thinking of his journey to that place,
And how 'twixt him and it was little space,
Then back to listlessness once more he turned,
Quenching the flame that in his sick heart burned.

What thing was left him now, but only this,
A life of aimless ease and luxury,
That he must strive to think the promised bliss,
Where hoping not for aught that was not nigh,
Midst vain pretence he should but have to die,
But every minute longing to confess
That this was nought but utter weariness.

So to the foolish image of delight
That rich men worship, now he needs must cling
Despite himself, and pass by day and night
As friendless and unloved as any king;
Till he began to doubt of everything
Amidst that world of lies; till he began
To think of pain as very friend of man.

So passed the time, and though he felt the chain
That round about his wasting life was cast,
He still must think the labour all in vain
To strive to free himself while life should last,
And so, midst all, two weary years went past,
Nought done, save death a little brought anear,
The hard deliverance that he needs must fear.

At last one dawn, when all the place was still,
He took that key, and e'en as one might gaze
Upon the record of some little ill
That happed in past days, now grown happy days,
He eyed it, sighing, 'neath the young sun's rays;
And silently he passed his palace through,
Nor told himself what deed he had to do.

He reached the stable where his steeds were kept,
And midst the delicate-limbed beasts he found
The mule that o'er the forest grass had stepped,
Then, having on her back the saddle bound,
Entered the house again, and, looking round
The darkened banquet-chamber, caught away
What simple food the nighest to him lay.

Then, with the hand that rich men fawned upon,
The wicket he unlocked, and forth he led
His beast, and mounted when the street was won,
Wherein already folk for daily bread
Began to labour, who now turned the head

To whisper as the rich man passed them by
Betwixt the frails of fresh-plucked greenery.

He passed the wall where Firuz first he saw,
The hostel where the dead man gave him food;
He passed the gate and 'gan at last to draw
Unto the country bordering on the wood,
And still he took no thought of bad or good,
Or named his journey, nay, if he had met
A face he knew, he might have turned back yet.

But all the folk he saw were strange to him,
And, for all heed that unto them he gave,
Might have been nought; the reaper's bare brown limb,
The rich man's train with litter and armed slave,
The girl bare-footed in the stream's white wave—
Like empty shadows by his eyes they passed,
The world was narrowed to his heart at last.

He reached the hill, which e'en in that strange mood
Seemed grown familiar to him, with no pain
He found the path that pierced the tangled wood,
And midst its dusk he gave his mule the rein,
And in no long time reached the little plain,
And then indeed the world seemed left behind,
And no more now he felt confused and blind.

He cried aloud to see the white house rise
O'er the green garden and the long white wall,

Which erst the pale moon showed his wondering eyes,
But on the stillness strange his voice did fall,
For in the noon now woodland creatures all
Were resting 'neath the shadow of the trees,
Patient, unvexed by any memories.

How should he rest, who might have come too late?
O'er the burnt plain he hurried, and laid hand
Upon the rusted handle of the gate,
Not touched since he himself thereby did stand,
The warm and scented air his visage fanned,
And on his head down rained the blossoms' dust,
As back the heavy grass-choked door he thrust.

But ere upon the path grown green with weed
He set his foot, he paused a little while,
And of her gear his patient beast he freed,
And muttered, as he smiled a doubtful smile,
"Behold now if my troubles make me vile,
And I once more have will to herd with man,
Let me get back, then, even as I can."

There 'neath the tangled boughs he went apace,
Remembering him awhile of that sad cry,
That erst had been his welcome to that place,
That showed him first it might be good to die,
When he but thought of new delights anigh;
Thereat he shuddered now, bethinking him
In what a sea he cast himself to swim.

But his fate lay before him, on he went,
And through the gilded doors, now open wide,
He passed, and found the flowery hangings rent,
And past his feet did hissing serpents glide,
While from the hall wherein the mourners died
A grey wolf glared, and o'er his head the bat
Hung, and the paddock on the hearth-stone sat.

He loitered not amid those loathsome things,
That in the place which erst had been so fair,
Brought second death to fond imaginings
Of that sweet life, he once had hoped for there;
So with a troubled heart and full of care,
Though still with wild hopes stirring his hot blood,
He turned his face unto the dreary wood.

No less the pleasance felt its evil day;
The trellis, that had shut the forest trees
From the fair flowers, all torn and broken lay,
Though still the lily's scent was on the breeze,
And the rose clasped the broken images
Of kings and priests, and those they once had loved,
And in the scented bush the brown bird moved.

But with the choking weeds the tulip fought,
Paler and smaller than he had been erst,
The wind-flowers round the well, fair feet once sought,
Were trodden down by feet of beasts athirst;
The well-trained apricot its bonds had burst;

The wild-cat in the cherry-tree anear
Eyed the brown lynx that waited for the deer.

A little while upon the black wood's edge
Did Bharam eye the ruin mournfully,
Then turned and said, "I take it as a pledge
That I shall not come back again to die;
The mocking image of felicity
Awaited those poor souls that failed herein,
But I most surely death or life shall win."

Thus saying, through the wood he 'gan to go,
And kindlier its black loneliness did seem
Than all the fairness ruin brought so low;
So with good heart he reached the swift full stream
And there, as in an old unfinished dream,
He stood among the mourners' graves and saw
Past the small boat the eddies seaward draw.

Slowly, as one who thinks not of his deed,
He gat into the boat, and loosed from shore,
And 'gan to row the ready shallop freed
Unto the landing cut beneath the door,
And in a little minute stood before
Its rusty leaves with beating heart, and hand
His wavering troubled will could scarce command.

But almost ere he willed it, was the key
Within the lock, and the great bolt sprang back,

The iron door swung open heavily,
And cold the wind rushed from a cavern black:
Then with one look upon the woodland track.
He stepped from out the fair light of the day,
Casting all hope of common life away.

For at his back the heavy door swung to,
Before him was thick darkness palpable;
And as he struggled further on to go,
With dizzied head upon the ground he fell,
And if he lived on yet, he scarce could tell,
Amid the phantoms new born in that place
That past his eyes 'gan flit in endless race.

Fair women changing into shapeless things,
His own sad face mirrored, he knew not how,
And heavy wingless birds, and beasts with wings,
Strange stars, huge swirling seas, whose ebb and flow
Now seemed too swift for thought, now dull and slow;
Such things emmeshed his dying troubled thought,
Until his soul to sightless sleep was brought.

But when he woke to languid consciousness
Too well content he was therewith at first,
To ope his eyes, or seek what things might bless
His soul with rest from thought of good and worst,
And still his faint incurious ease he nursed,
Till nigh him rang a bird's note sweet and clear,
And stirred in him the seeds of hope and fear.

Withal the murmur of a quiet sea
He heard, and mingled sounds far off and sweet,
And o'er his head some rustling summer tree;
Slowly thereon he gat unto his feet,
And therewithal his sleep-dazed eyes did meet
The westering golden splendour of the sun,
For on that fair shore day was well-nigh done.

Then from the flashing sea and gleaming sky
Unto the green earth did he turn him round,
And saw a fair land sloping lazily
Up to a ridge of green with grey rocks crowned,
And on those slopes did fruitful trees abound,
And, cleaving them, came downward from the hill
In many a tinkling fall a little rill.

Now with his wakening senses, hunger too
Must needs awake, parched did his dry throat feel,
And hurrying, toward the little stream he drew,
And by a clear and sandy pool did kneel
And quenched his thirst, the while his hand did steal
Unto his wallet, where he thought to find
The bread he snatched from vain wealth left behind.

But when within his hand he held that bread,
Mouldy and perished as with many days,
He wondered much that he had not been dead,
And fell to think with measureless amaze
By what unheard-of, unimagined ways

Unto that lonely land he had been brought;
Until, bewildered in the maze of thought

That needs could lead nowhither, he arose
And from the fairest of those fruit-hung trees
The ripest and most luscious seeds he chose,
And staved his hunger off awhile with these;
Then 'twixt their trunks got back to where the breeze
Blew cool from off the calm sea, thinking still
That thence his fate must come for good or ill.

Thus, looking unto right and left, he passed
Over the green-sward, till he reached the strand,
And nought was 'twixt the sea and him at last,
Except a lessening belt of yellow sand.
There, looking seaward, he awhile did stand,
Until at last the great sun's nether rim,
Red with the sea-mist, in the sea 'gan swim.

But 'gainst it now a spot did he behold,
Nor knew if he were dazzled with the light,
Till as the orb sank and the sea grew cold,
Greater that grew beneath the gathering night,
And when all red was gone, and clear and bright
The high moon was, beneath its light he saw
A ship unto him o'er the waters draw.

Quickly his heart 'gan beat at sight of it,
But what that he could do could change his fate?

So calmly on the turf's edge did he sit
The coming of that unknown keel to wait,
That o'er the moonlit sea kept growing great,
Until at last the dashing oars he heard,
The creaking yard, the master's shouted word.

Then as the black hull 'neath the moonlight lay,
In the long swell, bright against side and oar,
A little shallop therefrom took its way
Unto the low line of the breakers hoar,
And when its keel was firm upon the shore
Two women stepped out thence, and 'gan to go
To Bharam's place with gentle steps and slow.

Then he arose, and wondering what should be
The end hereof, stood gazing at them there,
And even in that doubtful light could see
That they were lovesome damsels young and fair;
And as he watched their garlanded loose hair
And dainty flutter of their rich array,
Full many a hope about his heart 'gan play.

Now they drew nigh, and one of them began
In a sweet voice these hopeful words to say,
"Fear not, but come with us, O happy man,
Nor with thy doubts or questions make delay;
For this soft night gets ready such a day,
As shall thy heart for feeble pining blame,
And call thy hot desire a languid shame."

Therewith she turned again unto the sea,
As though she doubted not what he would do
And Bharam followed after silently,
And went aboard the shallop with the two,
As one who dreams; and as the prow cleft through
The grey waves, sat beside them, pondering o'er
The days grown dim that led to that strange shore.

None spake to him, the mariners toiled on,
Silent the damsels sat, hand joined to hand,
Until the black sides of the ship were won;
Then folk hauled up the boat, his feet did stand
On the wide deck, the master gave command,
Back went the oars, and o'er the waters wan,
Unto the west 'neath sail and oar she ran.

All night they sailed, and when the dawn was nigh
And far astern the eastern sky grew bright,
A dark line seemed to cross the western sky
Afar and faint, and with the growing light
Another land began to heave in sight,
And when the lingering twilight was all done,
Grey cliffs they saw, made ruddy with the sun.

But when the shadow of their well-shaved mast
Had shortened that it no more touched the sea,
And well-nigh all the windy waste was past
That kept them from the land where they would be,
They turned about a ness, and 'neath their lee

A sandy-beached and green-banked haven lay,
For there a river cleft the mountains grey.

Thither they steered with no delay, and then
Upon the green slopes Bharam could behold
The white tents and the spears of many men,
And on the o'erhanging height a castle old,
And up the bay a ship o'erlaid with gold.
With golden sails and fluttering banners bright,
And silken awnings 'gainst the hot sun dight.

But underneath the tents, anigh that ship,
A space there was amidst of shadowing trees,
Well clad with turf down to the haven's lip;
And there, amongst the pasture of the bees,
Fanned by the long-drawn sweet-breathed ocean-breeze,
Well canopied, was set a wondrous throne,
Amidst whose cushions sat a maid alone.

Crowned as a queen was she, and round her seat
Were damsels gathered, clad just in such guise
As those who on the sands did Bharam meet,
And stood beside him now, with lovesome eyes.
All this saw Bharam in no other wise
Than one might see a dream becoming true,
Nor had he thought of what he next should do.

Only those longings, vague and aimless erst,
Now quickened tenfold, found a cause and aim,

And on his soul a flood of light outburst,
That swallowed up in brightness of its flame
Strange thoughts of death, and hopes without a name,
For now he knew that love had led him on,
Until—until, perchance, the end was won.

Unto that presence straight the shipmen steered,
And as the white foam from the oars did fly,
And the black prow the daisied green-sward neared,
Uprose a song from that fair company,
Which those two damsels echoed murmuringly,
Bearing love-laden words unto his ears
On tender music, mother of sweet tears.

SONG.

O thou who drawest nigh across the sea,
O heart that seekest Love perpetually,
Nor know'st his name, come now at last to me!

Come, thirst of love thy lips too long have borne,
Hunger of love thy heart hath long outworn,
Speech hadst thou but to call thyself forlorn.

The seeker finds now, the parched lips are led
To sweet full streams, the hungry heart is fed,
And song springs up from moans of sorrow dead.

Draw nigh, draw nigh, and tell me all thy tale;
In words grown sweet since all the woe doth fail,
Show me wherewith thou didst thy woe bewail.

Draw nigh, draw nigh, beloved! think of these
That stand around as well-wrought images,
Earless and eyeless as these trembling trees.

I think the sky calls living none but three:
The God that looketh thence and thee and me;
And He made us, but we made Love to be.

Think not of time, then, for thou shalt not die
How soon soever shall the world go by,
And nought be left but God and thou and I.

And yet, O love, why makest thou delay?
Life comes not till thou comest, and the day
That knows no end may yet be cast away.

Such words the summer air swept past his ears,
Such words the lovesome maidens murmured,
With unabashed soft eyes made wet with tears,
As though for them the world were really dead,
As though indeed those tender words they said
Each to her love, and each her fingers moved,
As though she thought to meet the hands she loved

But Bharam heeded not their lovesomeness,
As through his heart there shot one bitter thought
Of those dead mourners and their dead distress
That his own feet to such a land had brought,
But even ere the fear had come to nought,
The thought that made it, yea, all memory
Of what had been, had utterly passed by.

But when the song was done, and on the strand
The bark's prow grated, and the maidens twain
In low words bade him follow them aland,
Still, mid the certain hope of boundless gain,
About him clung the seeming-causeless pain
Of that past thought, that love had driven away,
The dreary teaching of a hopeless day.

And as unto the throne he drew anigh
He tried to say unto himself, "Alas!
Why am I full of such felicity?
How know I that for me the music was?
How know I yet what thing will come to pass?
How know I that my heart can bear the best,
Vain foolish heart that knew but little rest?"

A moment more and toward that golden ship
His face was turned, a hand was holding his;
His eyes with happy tears were wet, his lip
Still thrilled with memory of a loving kiss,
His eager ears drank in melodious bliss

Past words to tell of; joy was born at last,
Surely the bitterness of death was past.

How can I give her image unto you,
Clad in that raiment wonderful and fair?
What need? Be sure that love's eye pierceth through
What web soever hides the beauty there—
To tell her fairness? Measure forth the air,
And weigh the wind, and portion out the sun!
This still is left, less easy to be done.

Into the golden ship now passed the twain,
The maidens followed, and the soldiers moved
Their ordered ranks, the shoreward road to gain;
The minstrels played what tunes the best behoved,
While in the stern the lover and beloved
Had nought to do but each on each to gaze,
Without a thought of past or coming days.

Up stream the gold prow pointed, the long oars
Broke into curves of white the swirling green,
On each side opened out the changing shores;
So lovely there were all things to be seen,
That in the golden age they might have been;
But rather had he gaze upon those eyes
Than see the whole world freed from miseries.

Sometimes she said, "And this, O love, is thine
As thou art mine. Look forth thy land to see!"

But he looked not, but rather would entwine
His fingers in her fingers amorously,
And answer, "Yea, and that one day shall be
When thou shalt go upon the blossoms sweet,
And I must look thereon to see thy feet!"

Now the stream narrowed, and the country girls
Thronged on the banks to see the Queen go by,
And cast fresh flowers upon the weedy swirls.
"Look forth! they sing to our felicity!"
The Queen said, "And the city draweth nigh."
"Nay, nay," said Bharam, "I will look on them
When they shall kneel to kiss thy garment's hem."

Now far ahead, above dark banks of trees
Could they behold the city's high white wall,
And, as they neared it, on the summer breeze
Was borne the tumult of the festival;
And when that sound on Bharam's ears did fall,
He cried, "Ah, will they lengthen out the day,
E'en when kind night has drawn the sun away?"

She sighed and said, "Nay now, be glad, O king,
That thou art coming to thy very own;
Nor one day shalt thou think it a small thing
That thou therein mayst wear the royal crown
When somewhat weary thou at last art grown,
Through lapse of days, of this and this and this—
That something more is left thee than a kiss."

He stared at her wide eyes as one who heard
Yet knew not what the words might signify,
Then said, "And think'st thou I shall be afeard
To slay myself before our love goes by,
That changed by death, if we indeed can die,
Unwearied by this anxious, earthy frame,
I still may think of thee, and know no shame?"

She gazed upon his flushed face tenderly,
Reddening herself for love, but said not aught,
Only her bosom heaved with one soft sigh,
And some unravelled maze of troublous thought
Unbidden tears unto her sweet eyes brought;
And he forgot that shade of bitterness
When such a look his yearning heart did bless.

Thereat the silver trumpet's tuneful blare
Made music strange unto his lovesome dream,
For now before them lay the city fair,
With high white bridges spanning the swift stream,
And bridge and shore with wealth of gold did gleam.
From a great multitude shout followed shout,
And high in air the sound of bells leapt out.

And then the shipmen furled the golden sail—
Slowly the red oars o'er the stream did skim,
As 'twixt the houses the light wind 'gan fail,
Till by a palace on the river's brim,
Whose towering height made half the bells grow dim,

The golden ship was stayed, for they had come
Unto the happy seeker's wondrous home.

"Look up and wonder, well-beloved," she said,
As now they rose to go unto the shore,
"At what the men did for us who are dead,
And praise them for the depth of their past lore,
And thank them though their life is long past o'er.
If they had known that all these things should be
How better had they wrought for thee and me?"

Gravely she looked into his eager eyes,
That turned unto the house a little while,
But took small heed of all the phantasies
Wherewith those men their trouble did beguile,
Though calmly did the vast front seem to smile,
From all its breadth of beauty looking down
Upon the tumult of the joyous town.

Again she sighed, but passed on silently,
And o'er the golden gangway went the twain
Unto the gold shade of the doorway high,
Treading on golden cloths, betwixt a lane
Of girls who each had been a kingdom's bane
In toiling, troubled lands, where loveliness
In scanty measure longing men doth bless.

One moment, and the threshold Bharam passed
And that desire his heart was set upon

Yet would not name, his heart hath won at last.
Ah, if the end of all thereby were won!
For though, indeed, the noon-tide sun hath shone,
And all the clouds are scattered, who can say
What clouds shall curse the latter end of day?

THE days passed—growing sweeter as the year
Declined through autumn into winter-tide;
Perchance, for though no day could be so dear
As that whereon he first had seen his bride,
Yet still no less did love with him abide,
Tempered with quiet days and restfulness;
Desire fulfilled, renewed, his life did bless.

And thereto now were added other joys,
Her gifts indeed, unmeet for him to scorn:
The judgment-seat, the tourney's glorious noise,
The council wherein were the wise laws born;
Sweet tales of lovers vanquished and forlorn,
To make bliss greater when these lovers met,
Silent, alone, all troubles to forget—

All troubles to forget—the winter went,
Spring came, and love seemed worthier therewith
weighed,

The summer came, and brought no discontent,
Nor yet with autumn's fading did love fade,
And the cold winter love the warmer made.
—So Bharam said, when round his love he clung,
And lonely, still such words were on his tongue.

At last from this and that (it boots not now
To tell the why and wherefore of the thing),
Great war and strife with other lands did grow,
And weeping she around his neck must cling,
Bidding him look for such a welcoming
When he came back again, as should outdo
The day that made one heart and life of two.

Nor did this fail: tried at all points was he,
He met the foe, and, beaten back with shame,
Snatched from victorious hands the victory,
And, winner of a great and godlike name,
Sighing with love, back to his love he came,
Worthy of love and changed by love indeed,
And with most glorious love to be his meed.

—Ah, changed by love—the fickle careless earth,
The deeds of men, the troubles that they had,
That in first love he held of little worth,
Now like a well-told tale would make him glad,
And nought therein to him seemed lost or bad;
"And love," he said, "my joyous life doth bound,
E'en as the sea some fair isle flows around."

—"Love flows around"—alas, as time went on
Some strong career of striving would he stay,
And falter e'en at point of victory won,
And well-nigh cast the longed-for thing away:
"Nay, let me think of love," then would he say.
"Ah, I have swerved from singleness of heart,
Let me return, nor in these things have part."

"Let me return"—but, ah, what thing was this?
That in his love's arms he would feel the sting
Of vain desire, and ne'er-accomplished bliss.
—At whiles, indeed—for he had strength to fling
All thought away, and to his love to cling.
—At least as yet, and still he seemed to be
Dowered with the depth of all felicity.

So passed the time, till he two years had been
Living that joyous life in that fair land,
When on a day there came to him the Queen,
And said: "Fair love, all folk bow 'neath the hand
Of this or that, and I, at the command
Of one whose will I dare not disobey,
Must leave thee lonely till the hundredth day.

"Nay, now, forbear to ask me why I go!
Thou know'st all things are thine that I have got,
Nathless this one thing never shalt thou know,
Unless the love grow cold that once was hot,
And thou art grown aweary of thy lot.

Ah, love, forgive me! for thy kiss is sweet,
As cool fresh streams to bruised and weary feet.

"Yet one more word; the room where thou and I
Were left alone that day of all sweet days;
Enter it not, till that time is passed by
I told thee of, and many weary ways
My feet have worn, to meet thy loving gaze;
For surely as thy foot therein shall tread,
Thou unto me, as I to thee, art dead.

"And yet, for fear of base and prying folk,
Needs must thou bear about that chamber's key.
Ah, love, farewell! no hard or troublous yoke
Thou hast to bear, nor have I doubt of thee.
For all the stream of tears that thou dost see,
They are love's offspring only, for my heart
Yet more than heretofore in thine has part."

Thus did she go, and he so left behind,
Mourned for her and desired her very sore,
Yet, with a pang, he felt that he was blind,
Despite of words, that yet there was a store
Of some undreamed-of and victorious lore
He might not touch—frowning he turned away,
And seemed a troubled, gloomy man that day.

Yet loyally for many days he dwelt
Within that house, or from his golden throne

Good justice to the thronging people dealt;
But when night came, and he was left alone,
Then all that splendour scarcely seemed his own;
And when he fell to thinking of his love,
He 'gan to wish that he his heart might prove.

In agony he strove to cast from him
Fresh doubts of what she was, and all his tale
Rose up once more, now vague indeed and dim,
Yet worse therefore perchance—if he should fail,
And in some half-remembered hell go wail
His happy lot, the days that might have been!
Was she his bane?—his life, his love, his queen.

Then would he image forth her body fair,
And limb by limb would set before his eyes
Her loveliness as he had seen it there;
Then cry, "Why think of these vain mysteries
When still ahead such happy life there lies?
And yet and yet, this that doth so outshine
All other beauty, is it wholly mine?

"How can it change, that throne of loveliness?
How can it change—but I grow old and die.
Perchance some other heart those eyes shall bless,
Some other head upon that bosom lie,
When all that once I was is long gone by:
And now what memory through my mind has passed
Of men from some strange heaven of love outcast?

"Who knows but in that chamber I may find
The clue unto this tangled, weary maze,
And vision clear, whereas I now am blind,
And endless love instead of anxious days—
A glorious end to all these dark strange ways?
Perchance those words she did but say to me,
To try my heart—did she not give the key?"

So passed the days, and sometimes would he strive
To think of nothing but her dear return,
And midst of kingly deeds would think to live,
But then again full oft his heart would burn
The uttermost of all the thing to learn;
Love failed him not, but baneful jealousy
Had scaled his golden throne and sat thereby.

Now he began to wander nigh the door,
And draw from out its place the golden key,
And curse the gift, and wish the days passed o'er,
Till in his arms his love once more should be;
Yet still he dreaded what his eyes should see
In those familiar and beloved eyes,
Changed now perchance in some unlooked-for wise.

At last a day came, on the morn of it
Did he arise from haggard dreamful sleep,
And on the throne of justice did he sit,
In troublous outward things his soul to steep;
Then, armed, upon his war-horse did he leap,

And in the lists right eagerly did play,
As one who every care hath cast away.

Then came the evening banquet, and he sat
To watch the dancers' gold-adorned feet,
And with his great men talked of this and that,
Then rose, with gold a minstrel-man to greet,
Then listened to his pensive song and sweet
With serious eyes, and still in everything
He seemed an unrebuked and glorious king.

But at the dead of night was he alone
Once more, once more within his wavering heart
Strange thought against confused thought was thrown,
Nor knew he how real life from dreams to part,
All seemed to him a picture made by art,
Except the overwhelming strong desire
To know the end, that set his heart afire.

Dawn found him thus; then he arose from bed,
He kissed her picture hanging on the wall,
The linen things that veiled her goodlihead
From all but him, and still, like bitterest gall,
A thought rose up within him therewithal,
And strangely was his heart confused with fears
That checked the rise of tender, loving tears.

He gat the golden key into his hand,
And once more had a glimmering memory

Of how just so he once before did stand,
Ready another golden key to try;
Then murmured he, "Gat I not bliss thereby?
Unless all this is such a gleam of thought,
That to a man's mind sometimes will be brought.

"Of how he lived before, he knows not where."
So saying from the chamber did he pass,
And went a long way down a cloister fair,
And o'er a little pleasance of green grass,
Until anigh the very door he was
That hid that mystery from him; there he stayed,
And in his hand the golden key he weighed.

There stood he, trying hard to think thereof,
The better and the worse, how all would be
If he should do the deed, but thought would move
From this thing unto that confusedly,
And neither past nor future could he see,
Nay scarce could say of what thing then he thought,
Such fever now the fierce desire had wrought.

Not long he lingered, in the lock he set
The golden key, as one constrained thereto,
And thrust the door back, and with scared eyes met
The lovely chamber that so well he knew,
And therein still was all in order due,
No deathlike image seared his wondering eyes,
No strange sound smote his ears with ill surprise.

He sighed, and smiled, as one would say, "Ah, why
Have I feared this, wherein was nought to fear,
Wrapping familiar things in mystery?"
And even therewithal did he draw near
To well-remembered things his soul held dear,
Gazing at all those matters one by one,
That told of sweet things there in past days done.

There in the grey light were the hangings fair,
No figure in them changed now any whit,
The marble floor half hid with carpets rare
E'en as when first he saw her feet on it,
A grey moth's whirring wings indeed did flit
Across the fair bed's gleaming canopy,
But yet no other change had passed thereby.

And by the bed upon the floor there lay
Soft raiment of his love, as though that she
Had there unclad her, ere she went away.
He stopped and touched the fair things tenderly,
And love swept over him as some grey sea
Sweeps o'er the dry shells of a sandy bank,
And with dry lips his own salt tears he drank

He rose within a while, and turned about
Unto the door, and said, "Three days it is
Before she comes to take away all doubt
And wrap my soul again in utter bliss;
I will depart, that she may smile at this,

Giving the pity and forgiveness due
Unto a heart whose feebleness she knew.

Therewith he turned to go, but even then,
Upon a little table nigh his hand,
Beheld a cup the work of cunning men
For many a long year vanished from the land,
And up against it did a tablet stand;
Whereon were gleaming letters writ in gold;
Then breathlessly these things did he behold;

For never had his eyes beheld them erst,
And well he deemed the secret lay therein;
Trembling, he said, "This cup may quench my thirst,
Fair rest from this strange tablet may I win,
And if I sin she will forgive my sin;
Nay, rather since her word I disobey
In entering here, no heavier this will weigh."

Withal he took the tablet, and he read;
"O thou who, venturing much, hast gained so much.
Drink of this cup, and be remembered
When all are gone whose feet the green earth touch:
Dull is the labouring world, nor holdeth such
As think and yet are happy; then be bold,
And things unthought of shall thine eyes behold!

"Yea, thou must drink, for if thou drinkest not
Nor soundest all the depths of this hid thing,

Think'st thou that these my words can be forgot,
How close soever thou to love mayst cling,
How much soever thou art still a king?
"Drink then, and take what thou hast fairly won,
For make no doubt that thine old life is done."

He took the cup and round about the bowl
Beheld strange figures carved, strange letters writ,
But mid the hurrying tumult of his soul,
He of their meaning then could make no whit,
Though afterwards their smallest lines would flit
Before his eyes, in times that came to him
When many a greater matter had grown dim.

So with closed eyes he drank, and once again,
While on his quivering lip the sweet draught hung,
Did he think dimly of those mourning men
And saw them winding the dark trees among,
And in his ears their doleful wailing rung;
His love and all the glories of his home
E'en in that minute shadows had become.

E'en in that minute, though at first indeed
In one quick flash of pain unbearable,
His love, his queen, made bare of any weed,
Seemed standing there, as though some tale to tell
From opened lips; and then a dark veil fell
O'er all things there, a chill and restless breeze
Seemed moaning through innumerable trees.

Yet still he staggered onwards to the door
With arms outspread, as one who in dark night
Wanders through places he has known before;
Wide open were his eyes that had no sight,
And with a feverish flush his cheeks were bright,
His lips moved, some unspoken words to say,
As, sinking down, across the door he lay.

WHAT strange confused dreams swept through his sleep!
What fights he fought, nor knew with whom or why;
How piteously for nothing he must weep,
For what inane rewards he still must try
To pierce the inner earth or scale the sky!
What faces long forgot rose up to him!
On what a sea of unrest did he swim!

He woke, the wind blew cold upon his face,
The sound of swirling waters smote his ear,
Through the deep quiet of some lonely place;
Shuddering with horror at what might be near,
He closed his dazzled eyes again for fear,
Ere they had seen aught but the light of day
And formless things against it, black and grey.

Trembling awhile he lay, and scarcely knew
Why he was sick with fear, but when at last

His wretched soul unto his body drew,
And somewhat he could think about the past,
As one might wake to hell, around he cast
A haggard glance, and saw before him there
A grey cliff rising high into the air

Across a deep swift river, and the door
Shut fast against him, did he see therein,
Wherethrough with trembling steps he passed before
That happy life above all lives to win,
And round about him the sharp grass and thin,
Covered low mounds that here and there arose,
For to his head his forerunners were close.

Then with changed voice he moaned and to his feet
Slowly he gat, and 'twixt the tree-boles grey
He 'gan to go, and tender words and sweet
Were in his ears, the promise of a day
When he should cast all troublous thoughts away.
He stopped, and turned his face unto the trees
To hearken to the moaning of the breeze;

Because it seemed well-nigh articulate;
He cried aloud, "Come back, come back to me!"
If yet the echo of the fearful gate
Had any sound to help his misery;
He shut his eyes, lest he perchance might be
Caught by some fearful dream within a dream,
That he might wake up to his gold bed's gleam.

Voiceless the wind was, the grey cliff was dumb,
His eyes could show him nought but that same place
Whereto in days of hope his feet had come;
He cast himself adown, and hid his face
Within the grass, and heeding no disgrace,
Howled beastlike, till his voice grew hoarse and dim,
And little life indeed seemed left in him.

Then in a while he rose and tottered on
Adown that path, scarce knowing what had been
Or why his woe was such, until he won
To where had been of old the pleasance green,
Whose beauty, whose decay he erst had seen
That now indeed a tangled waste had grown,
Whose first estate scarce any man had known.

Roofless above it then he saw the house,
Whose vanished loveliness his heart had filled
With fresh luxurious longings amorous,
And thitherward, though thus he scarcely willed,
His feet must stray to see the wild bird build
Her nest within the chambers, once made bright,
To house the delicate givers of delight.

And now the first rage of his grief being o'er,
Madness was past, though pain was greater still,
And he remembered well the days of yore,
And how his great desire made all things ill,
And aye with restlessness his life did fill;

Too hard to bear that he must cast away
Honour and wealth, to reach e'en such a day.

Now in the hall upon that bench of stone,
Where erst the mourners used to sit, he sat,
Striving to think of all that he had done
Before his heart's unnamed desire he gat,
Striving to hope that still in this or that
He might take pleasure yet before he died,
That the hard days a little joy might hide.

He moaned to think that he had cast away
All hope of quiet life then when his hand
Was on the key 'neath that high cliff and grey,
And looking backward he awhile did stand—
Needs must he deem him worse than that sad band
Who therein erst their wretched lives outwore,
However great the burden that they bore.

For they, he said, had somewhat left of rest,
Since in that place indeed they could abide,
But on his heart the weight of woe so pressed
That he his wretched head could never hide,
But needs must wander forth until he died—
Ah God, more full of horror seemed that place,
Than the world's curious eyes upon his face.

For there he seemed to sleep that he might dream
The worst of dreams,—he seemed to be awake,

That through them all might pierce no hopeful gleam,
That he the fearful chain might never break;
And shameful images his eyes must make
That shuddering he must call by his love's name,
And on his lips must gather words of shame.

Midst this, I say, what will was left to him,
Still urged him unto men's abodes again,
So that he rose, and though his eyes were dim
With misery, he crossed the sunburnt plain,
And as one walks in sleep, with little pain
He pierced the forest through, and came once more
Unto the hill that looked the uplands o'er.

Fierce was the summer sun of that bright day,
When on the upland road he set his feet,
And man and beast within the shadow lay
And rested, but no rest to him was sweet
That he could gain, and when the hot sun beat
Upon his head as from the wood he passed,
Nought noted he that flame upon him cast.

At end of day he reached the city gate,
And now no more he moaned, his eyes were dry;
Shut in his body's bonds, his soul would wait,
The utmost term of all its misery,
Nor hope for any ease, nor pray to die.
Some poor abode within that city fair
He gat himself and passed the long days there.

But now and then men saw him on the quays,
Gazing on busy scenes he heeded nought,
Or passing through the crowd on festal days,
Or in some net of merry children caught,
And when they saw his dreamy eyes distraught,
His changeless face drawn with that hidden pain,
They said, "THE MAN WHO NE'ER SHALL LAUGH
AGAIN."

AH, these, with life so done with now, might deem
That better is it resting in a dream,
Yea, e'en a dull dream, than with outstretched hand,
And wild eyes, face to face with life to stand,
No more the master now of anything,
Through striving of all things to be the king—
Than waking in a hard taskmaster's grasp
Because we strove the unsullied joy to clasp—
Than just to find our hearts the world, as we
Still thought we were and ever longed to be,
To find nought real except ourselves, and find
All care for all things scattered to the wind,
Scarce in our hearts the very pain alive.
Compelled to breathe indeed, compelled to strive,
Compelled to fear, yet not allowed to hope—
For e'en as men laid on a flowery slope
'Twixt inaccessible cliffs and unsailed sea,
Painless, and waiting for eternity
That will not harm, were these old men now grown.
The seed of unrest, that their hearts had sown,
Sprung up, and garnered, and consumed, had left
Nought that from out their treasure might be reft;
All was a picture in these latter days,
That had been once, and they might sit and praise
The calm, wise heart that knoweth how to rest,

The man too kind to snatch out at the best,
Since he is part of all, each thing a part,
Beloved alike of his wide-loving heart.

Ah, how the night-wind raved, and wind and sea
Clashed wildly in their useless agony,
But dulled not or made weak the minstrel's song
That through the hall bemocked the lost year's wrong.

NOVEMBER.

ARE thine eyes weary? is thy heart too sick
To struggle any more with doubt and thought,
Whose formless veil draws darkening now and thick
Across thee, e'en as smoke-tinged mist-wreaths brought
Down a fair dale to make it blind and nought?
Art thou so weary that no world there seems
Beyond these four walls, hung with pain and dreams?

Look out upon the real world, where the moon,
Half-way 'twixt root and crown of these high trees,
Turns the dead midnight into dreamy noon,
Silent and full of wonders, for the breeze
Died at the sunset, and no images,
No hopes of day, are left in sky or earth—
Is it not fair, and of most wondrous worth?

Yea, I have looked and seen November there;
The changeless seal of change it seemed to be,
Fair death of things that, living once, were fair;
Bright sign of loneliness too great for me,
Strange image of the dread eternity,
In whose void patience how can these have part,
These outstretched feverish hands this restless heart?

ON a clear eve, when the November sky
Grew red with promise of the hoar-frost nigh,
These ancient men turned from the outside cold,
With something like content that they, grown old,
Needed but little now to help the ease
Of those last days before the final peace.
The empty month for them left no regret
For sweet things gained and lost, and longed for yet,
'Twixt spring-tide and this dying of the year.
Few things of small account the whole did bear,
Nor like a long lifetime of misery
Those few days seemed, as oft to such may be
As, seeing the patience of the world, whereby
Midst all its strife it falls not utterly
Into a wild, confused mass of pain,
Yet note it not, and have no will to gain,
Since they are young, a little time of rest,
Midst their vain raging for the hopeless best.

Such thought, perchance, was in his heart, who broke
The silence of the fireside now, and spoke;
"This eve my tale tells of a fair maid born
Within a peaceful land, that peace to scorn,
In turn to scorn the deeds of mighty kings,
The counsel of the wise, and far-famed things,
And envied lives; so, born for discontent,

She through the eager world of base folk went,
Still gaining nought but heavier weariness.
God grant that somewhere now content may bless
Her yearning heart; that she may look and smile
On the strange earth that wearied her awhile,
And now forgets her! Yet so do not we,
Though some of us have lived full happily!"

THE STORY OF RHODOPE.

ARGUMENT.

THERE was in a poor land a certain maid, lowly but exceeding beautiful, who, by a strange hap, was drawn from her low estate, and became a queen and the world's wonder.

A GRECIAN-SPEAKING folk there dwelt of yore,
Whose name my tale remembers not, between
The snow-topped mountains and the sea-beat shore,
Upon a strip of plain, and upland green,
Where seldom was the worst of summer seen,
And seldom the last bond of winter's cold;
Easy was life 'twixt garden, field, and fold.

My tale says these dealt little with the sea,
But for the mullet's flushed vermilion,
And weight o' the tunny, and what things might be
Behind the snowy tops but moon and sun
They knew not, nor as yet had anyone
Sunk shaft in hill-side there, or dried the stream
To see if 'neath its sand gold specks might gleam.

Yet rich enow they were; deep-uddered kine
Went lowing towards the pails at eventide;
The sheep cropped close unto the well-fenced vine,
Whose clusters hung upon the southering side
Of the fair hill; the brown plain far and wide
Changed year by year through green to hoary gold,
And the unherded, moaning bees untold,

Blind-eyed to aught but blossoms, ranged the land,
Working for others; and the clacking loom
Not long within the homestead still did stand;
The spindles twirled within the women's room,
And oft amidst the depth of winter's gloom,
From off the poplar-block white chips would fly
'Neath some deft hand, watched of the standers-by.

Sometimes too would the foreign chapmen come,
And beach their dromond in the sandy bay,
And then the women-folk from many a home,
With heavy-laden beasts would take their way,
And round the black-keeled ship expend the day,
And by the moon would come back, light enow,
With things soon told for that rough wealth to show.

Therefore of delicate array, full oft
Small lack there was in coffers of that land,
And gold would shine on shoulders smooth and soft,
And sparklike gems glitter from many a hand,
And by the altar would the goodman stand

Upon the solemn days of sacrifice,
Clad in attire of no such wretched price.

But the next morn the yellow-headed girls
Would be afield, or 'twixt the vine-rows green,
And on the goodman's forehead would no pearls,
But rather sundrawn beaded drops be seen,
As the bright share carved out the furrow clean,
Or the thick swath fell 'neath the sturdy stroke:
For all must labour midst that simple folk.

Now, in a land where few were poor, if none
Were lordly rich, a certain man abode,
Who poorer was perchance than anyone
That ruled a house; yea, somewhat of a load
Of fears he bare adown life's latter road,
For, touching now upon his sixtieth year,
His wealth still waned, and still his house grew bare.

Why this should be none knew, for he was deft
In all the simple craft of that fair land,
Plough-stilt, and spade, and sickle, and axe-heft,
As much as need be pressed his hardened hand,
And creeping wanhope still did he withstand;
Wedded he was, and his grey helpmate too
Was skilled in all, and ever wrought her due.

Yet did his goods decrease: at end of dry
He cut his hay, to lie long in the rain;

And timorous must he let the time go by
For vintaging; and August came in vain
To his thin wheat; his sheep of wolves were slain;
Lame went his horses, barren were his kine,
His slaughtering-stock before the knife would pine.

All this befell him more than most I say,
And yet he lived on; gifts were plenty there,
The rich man's wealth but seldom hoarded lay
And at a close-fist would the people stare,
And point the finger as at something rare—
Yet ever giving is a burden still,
And fast our goodman trundled down the hill.

Not always though had fortune served him thus,
In earlier days rich had he been and great,
But had no chick or child to bless his house,
And much did it mislike him of his fate,
And early to the Gods he prayed and late,
To give him that if all they took besides,
As to fate's feet will blind men still be guides.

So on a day when more than twenty years
Of childless wedlock had oppressed his wife,
She spake to him with smiles and happy tears;
And said, "Be glad, for ended is the strife
Betwixt us and the Gods, and our old life
Shall be renewed to us; the blossom clings
Unto the bough long barren, the waste sings."

Joyful he was at those glad words, and went
A changed man through his homestead on that morn,
And on fair things stored up he stared intent,
And hugged himself on things he erst did scorn,
When life seemed quickly ended and forlorn.
And so the days passed, till the time was come
When a new voice should wail on its cold home.

March was it, but a foretaste of the June
The earth had, and the budding linden-grove
About the homestead, with the brown bird's tune
Was happy, and the faint blue sky above
The black-thorn blossoms made meet roof for love,
For though the south wind breathed a thought of rain,
No cloud as yet its golden breadth did stain.

That afternoon within his well-hung hall,
Amidst of many thoughts the goodman lay
Until a gentle sleep on him 'gan fall,
And he began to dream, but the sweet day
The dream forgat not, nor could wipe away
The pictures of his home that seemed so good,
For midst his garden in his dream he stood;

Hand in hand with his wife he seemed to be,
And both their eyes were lovingly intent
Upon a little blossom fair to see
Before their feet, that through the fresh air sent
Sweet odours; but as over it they bent,

The day seemed changed to cloudiness and rain,
And the sweet flower, whereof they were so fain,

Was grown a goodly sapling, and they gazed
Wondering thereat, but loved it nothing less.
But as they looked a bright flame round it blazed,
And hid it for a space, and weariness
The souls of both the good folk did oppress,
And on the earth they lay down side by side,
And unto them it was as they had died.

Yet did they know that o'er them hung the tree
Grown mighty, thick-leaved, on each bough did hang
Crown, sword, or ship, or temple fair to see;
And therewithal a great wind through it sang,
And trumpet blast there was; and armour rang
Amid that leafy world, and now and then
Strange songs were sung in tongues of outland men.

Amid these sounds the goodman heard at last
A song in his own tongue, and sat upright
And blinking at the broad bright sun that cast
A straight beam through the window, making bright
The dusky hangings; till his gathering sight
Showed him outside two damsels, pail on head,
Who went by, singing, to the milking shed.

And meeting them with jingling bit and trace

Came the grey team from field; a merry lad
Sat sideways on the foremost, broad of face,
Freckled and flaxen-haired, whose red lips had
A primrose 'twixt them, yet still blithe and glad,
With muffled whistle, swinging, did he mock
The maidens' song and the brown throstle-cock.

Then rose the goodman, happy, for his dream
Seemed nowise ill to think on; rather he
Some echo of his hopes the thing did deem
If hardly any certain prophecy
Of happy things in time to come to be;
And into the March sun he wandered forth,
With life and wealth all grown of double worth.

From barn to well-stocked field he went that eve,
Smiling on all, and wondering how it was
That any one in such a world might grieve,
At least for long, at what might come to pass;
The soft south-wind, the flowers amid the grass,
The fragrant earth, the sweet sounds everywhere,
Seemed gifts too great almost for man to bear.

Long wandered he, the happiest of all men
Till day was gone, and the white moon and high
Cast a long shadow on the white stones, when
He came once more his homestead door anigh;
And there a girl stood watching, and a cry

Burst from her lips when she beheld him come;
She said, "O welcome to thy twice-blessed home!

"Thy wife hath borne to thee a maiden fair,
Come and behold it, and give thanks withal
Unto the Gods, who thus have heard thy prayer."
Sweetly that voice upon his ears did fall,
'Twixt him and utter bliss no bounding wall
Seemed raised now, nor did end of life seem nigh;
Once more he had forgot that he must die.

So on the morrow high feast did he hold,
And all the guests with gifts were satisfied,
And gladdened were the Gods of field and fold,
With many a beast that at their altars died.
How should the spring of all that wealth be dried?
Nought did he deal with untried things or strange,
'Twixt year and year how might the seasons change?

Well, by next year, grown had the child and thriven
Unto his heart's desire, and in his hall
Again was high feast held, and good gifts given
To the departing guests; yet did it fall
That somewhat his goods minished therewithal,
But little grief it gave him; "Ah, let be
This year will raise the scale once more," said he.

But as the time passed, with the child's increase
Did ill luck grow apace, till field by field

Fell his lands from him; nought he knew of ease,
Yet little good hap did his trouble yield;
The Gods belike a new bag had unsealed
Of hopeless longing for him, and his day
Mid restless yearning still must pass away.

SO things went on, till June of that same year
Whereof I tell, when nineteen May-tides green
The maid had looked on, and was grown so fair
That never yet the like of her had been
Within that land; and her divine soft mien,
Her eyes and her soft speech, now blessed alone
A house wherefrom all fair things else were gone.

Yet whoso gloomed thereat, not she it was
Who with her grave set face and heart unmoved,
Watched, wearied not nor pleased, each new day pass;
Nor thought of change, she said. As well behoved,
By many men ere now was she beloved;
Wild words she oft had heard, and harder grown
At bitter tears about her fair feet strown.

For far apart from these she seemed to be,
Their joys and sorrows moved her not, and they
Looked upon her as some divinity,
And cursed her not, though whiles she seemed to lay
A curse on them unwitting, and the day

Seemed grown unhappy, useless, as she came
With eyes fulfilled of thoughts of life and shame

Across their simple merriment. Meanwhile
She laboured as need was, nor heeded aught
What thing she did, nor yet did aught seem vile
More than another that the long day brought
Unto her hands; and as her father fought
Against his bitter foe, she watched it all
As though in some strange play the thing did fall.

And he, who loved her yet amidst of fear,
Would look upon her, wondering, even as though
He, daring not her soul to draw anear,
Yet of her hopes and fears was fain to know,
Was fain to hope that she one day would show
In what wise he within her heart was borne;
Yea, if that day he found in her but scorn.

It fell then in the June-tide, mid these things,
That on an eve within the bare great hall,
When nigh the window the bat's flickering wings
Were brushing, and the soft dew fast did fall,
And o'er the ferry far away did call
The homeward-hastening traveller, that the three
Sat resting in that soft obscurity.

Some tale belike unto the other two
The goodman had been telling, for he said,

"Well, in the end no more the thieves might do,
For when enough of them were hurt or dead
Needs must they cry for quarter; by Jove's head,
That parley as sweet music did I hear,
Who for three hours had seen grim death anear.

"So then their tall ship did we take in tow,
And beached her in the bay with no small pain.
The painted dragon-head, that ye note now
Grin at Jove's temple-door with gapings vain,
And her steel beaks the merchant-galleys' bane,
We smote away; with every second oar
We roofed that house of refüge nigh the shore.

"Then fell we unto ransacking her hold,
And left them store of meal, but took away
Armour, fair cloths, and silver things and gold,
Rich raiment, wine and honey; then we lay
Upon the beach that latter end of day,
And shared the spoil by drawing short and long—
That was before my fate 'gan do me wrong,

"And good things gat I; two such casks of wine,
And such a jar of honey, as would make
The very Gods smile, had they come to dine
E'en in this bare hall; ah! my heart doth ache
O daughter Rhodope, for thy sweet sake,
When of the gold-sewn purple robe I tell
That certes now had matched thy beauty well.

"What else? a crested helm all golden wrought,
A bow and sheaf of arrows—there they hang
Since they with one thing else came not to nought
Of all the things o'er which the goodwife sang,
When on the threshold first my spear-butt rang,
And o'er the bay the terror of the sea
With clipped wings laboured slow and painfully.

"Take down the bow, goodwife; a thing of price
Though unadorned, therefore it yet bides here;
For trusty is it in the wood, and wise
The long shafts are to find the dappled deer
And mend our four days' fast with better cheer.
But for the other thing—the twilight fails
Amid these half-remembered woeful tales;

"So light the taper for a little while
To see a marvel." Therewith speedily
The goodwife turned and lighted up her smile,
And deep-set eyes turned full on Rhodope
As hoping there some eagerness to see;
But on the brightening stars her wide eyes stared
E'en when the taper through the darkness glared.

Then to the great chest did the goodman go,
And turning o'er the coarser household gear
That lay therein, much stuff aside did throw
Ere from the lowest depths his hand did bear
A silken cloth of red, embroidered fair,

Wrapped about something; this upon the board
He laid, and 'gan unfold the precious hoard.

With languid eyes that hoped for little joy
Did Rhodope, now turning, gaze thereon,
And wait the showing forth of the fair toy,
In days long past from fear and battle won;
But yet a strange light in her bright eyes shone
When now the goodman did the cloth unfold,
And showed the gleam of precious gems and gold.

And there upon the silken cloth now lay
Twin shoes first made for some fair woman's feet,
Wrought like the meadows of an April day,
With gems amidst the sun of gold; most meet
To show in kings' halls, when the music sweet
Is at its softest, and the dance grown slow,
Midst of white folds the feet of maids may show

Now unto these fair things went Rhodope,
And, blushing faintly, 'gan the latchets touch,
And drew her hand across them daintily,
Then let it fall, smiling, that overmuch
She thought of them, then turned away to such
Rude work as then the season asked of her,
With face firm set that weary life to bear.

Then said the goodman, with a rueful smile

Upon her, "Chick or child I had not then,
But riches, wherewith fortune did beguile
My heart to ask for more; and now again
That thou grow'st fairer than the seed of men,
All goes from me—and let these go withal,
Since I am thrust so rudely to the wall!

"Long have I kept them; first, for this indeed
That few men of our land have will therefor
To pay me duly; and the coming need
Still did I fear would make the past less sore;
And then withal a man well skilled in lore
Grew dreamy o'er them once, and said that they
Bore with them promise of a changing day.

"Yet bread is life, and while we live we yet
May turn a corner of this barren lane,
And Jove's high-priest hath ever prayed to get
These fair things, and prayed hitherto in vain:
Belike a yoke of oxen might I gain
To turn the home-field deeper, when the corn,
Such as it is, to barn and stack is borne.

"The meal-ark groweth empty too, and thou,
O fairest daughter, worthy to be clad
In weed like this, shalt feel November blow
No blessing to thee; cask-staves must be had
Against the vintage, seeing that men wax glad

Already o'er the bunches, and the year
Folk deem great wealth to all men's sons will bear.

"So, daughter, unto thee this charge I give
To take these things tomorrow morn with thee
Unto Jove's priest, and say, we needs must live;
Therefore these fair shoes do I let him see,
That he may say what he will give to me,
That they may shine upon his daughter's feet,
When she goes forth the sacrifice to meet."

Now as he spake again a light flush came
Into her cheek, and died away again;
Then cried the goodwife; "Ah, thou bearest shame
That we are fallen 'neath the feet of men,
That thou goest like a slave! what didst thou then
So coldly e'en on this man's son to look,
That he thy scornful eyes no more might brook?"

But still sat Rhodope, as though of stone
Her face was, and the goodman spake and said;
"Nay, mother, nay, she is not such an one
As lightly to our highest to be wed
Before the crown of love has touched her head:
Be patient; hast thou ne'er heard stories tell
What things to such as her of old befell?"

Kindly he smiled at her, as half he meant
The words he said; but now her changeless eye

Cast on him one hard glance, and then she bent
Over her work, and with a half-choked sigh
The goodman rose, and from a corner nigh
Took up some willow-withes, and so began
To shape the handle of a winnowing fan.

BUT with the new day's sun might you behold
The maiden's feet firm planted on the way
Which led unto the vale, where field and fold
About the temple of the Thunderer lay,
And the priest wrought, a sturdy carle today
Within the hay-field or behind the plough,
Tomorrow dealing with high things enow.

First betwixt sunny meads the highway ran
With homesteads set therein, and vineyards green,
Now merry with the voice of maid and man,
Who shouted greetings the tall rows between,
Whereto she answered softly, as a queen
Who feels herself of other make to be
Than those who worship her divinity.

The dark-eyed shepherd slowly by her passed,
And from his face faded the merry smile,
And down upon the road his eyes he cast,
And strove with other names his heart to wile
From thought of her; so coarse he seemed and vile

Before her smileless face, o'er which there shone
Some glory, as of a bright secret sun,

That was for her alone. The mother stood
Within her door, and as the gown of grey
Fluttered about her, and the coarse white hood
Flashed from the oak-shade o'er the sunlit way,
She muttered after her; "Ah, have thy day,
If thou wert set high up as thou art low,
On many a neck those feet of thine should go!"

But heeding little of the hearts of these
She went upon her way, and walking fast
Soon left the tilled fields and the cottages,
For toward the mountain-slopes the highway passed,
And turned unto the south, and 'gan at last
To mount aloft 'twixt heathery slopes set o'er
With red-trunked pines, and mossy rocks and hoar.

Still fast she went, though high the sun was grown,
For on strange thoughts and wild her heart was set,
Those things held in the bosom of her gown
Seemed teaching hopes she might not soon forget
She clenched her hands harder and harder yet,
And cried aloud; "So small, so quickly done,
O idle, timorous life beneath the sun!

"And here amid these fields and mountains grey,
Drop after drop slowly it ebbs from me,

And leaves no new thing gained; day like to day,
Face like to face, as waves in some calm sea!
With memory of our sad mortality
Pipes the dull tune of earth, nought comes anigh
To give us some bright dream before we die.

"What say'st thou—'Beautiful thou art and livest,
And men there are, strong, young and fair enow,
To take with thankful heart e'en what thou givest;
Love and be loved then!'—Nay, heart, dost thou know
How through thin flame of love thou still wilt show
The long years set with mocking images,
Ready to trap me if I think of these?

"Ah, love they say, and love! Shall not love fade
And turn a prison, barred with vain regret
And vain remorse that we so lightly weighed
The woes wherein our stumbling feet were set,
Stifling with thoughts we never may forget;
Because life waneth, while we strive to turn
And seek another thing for which to yearn?

"So deem I of the life that holds me here,
As though I were the shade of one long dead,
Come back a while from Pluto's region drear
To mine own land where unremembered
My fathers are—Lo, now, these words just said,
This heathery slope my feet are passing o'er,
Yon grey-winged dove—has it not been before?

"Would then that I were gone, and lived again
Another life;—if it must still be so,
That life on life passes, forgotten, vain
To still our longings, that no soul can know
By what has been how this and this shall go—
Because methinks I yet have heard men tell
How lives there were wherein great things befell.

"How mid such life had I forgot the past,
Nor thought about the future! but been glad
While round my head a dreamy veil I cast,
And seemed to strive with seeming good or bad;
Till at the last some dream I might have had
That nigh a god I was become to be,
And, dying, yet should keep all memory;

"Know what I was, nor change my hope and fear
All utterly, but learn why I was born,
Nor come to loathe what once to me was dear,
Nor dwell amidst a world of ghosts forlorn,
Nor see kind eyes, and hear kind words, with scorn.
—But ye, O fields, and hills, and steads of men,
Why were ye fair to mock my longings then?"

And therewithal panting she turned, and stood
High up the hillside; a light fitful wind
Sung mournful ditties through the pine-tree wood
That edged the borders of the pass behind,
And made most fitting music to her mind,

But clear and hot the day of June did grow,
And a fair picture spread out down below.

The green hill-slopes, besprinkled o'er with kine,
And a grey neat-herd wandering here and there,
And then the greener squares of well-propped vine,
The changing cornfields, and the homesteads fair,
The white road winding on, that yet did bear
Specks as of men and horses; the grey sea
Meeting the dim horizon dreamily.

A little while she gazed, then, with a sigh,
She turned again, and went on toward the pass,
But slowly now, and somewhat wearily,
And murmuring as she met the coarser grass
Within the shade: "What, something moved I was,
By hope, and pity of myself! Well then,
I shall not have that joy so oft again."

Then with bent head, 'twixt rocky wall and wall,
Slowly she went, and scarce knew what she thought,
So many a picture on her heart did fall,
Nor would she let one wish to her be brought
Of good or better. Going so, distraught,
The long rough road was nothing to her feet,
Nor took she heed of what her eyes might meet.

But so far through the pass at last she came,
That the road fell unto the temple-vale,

And there she stopped and started, for her name
She heard called out. She thought of many a tale
Of gods who brought to mortals joy or bale,
For so, despite herself, her thoughts would run,
That all the joy of life was not yet done.

But from the hillside came a dappled hound
That fawned upon her e'en as one he knew,
And when she raised her eyes, and looked around,
She saw the man indeed he 'longed unto,
A huntsman armed, and clad in gown of blue,
Come clattering down the stones of the pass-side;
So, standing still, his coming did she bide.

She smiled a smile that was not all of bliss,
For this was he of whom her mother spake,
The high-priest's son, who fain had made her his;
And at the sight of him her heart did ache
With hapless thoughts, and scorn and shame 'gan wake
Within her mind, that still she strove to lull,
Calling herself both cursed and beautiful.

So, while she gathered heart of grace to meet
The few words they might speak together there,
He was beside her; slim he was and fleet,
Well knit, with dark-brown eyes and crisp black hair,
Eager of aspect, round-chinned, fresh, and fair,
And well attired as for that simple folk
Who in those days might bear no great man's yoke.

Now his lip trembled, and he blushed blood-red,
Then turned all pale again. "O Rhodope,
Right fair thou go'st afoot this morn," he said;
"Hast thou some errand with my sire or me?"
And therewithal, as if unwittingly,
Unto her hand did he stretch out his hand;
But moveless as an image did she stand,

But that her gown was fluttering in the wind
That came up from the pass. She spake as one
That hath no care at heart: "I thought to find
Thy father, and to give to him alone
A message from my father. Is he gone?"
He seemed to swallow something in his throat:
"These two nights, maiden, hath he been afloat,

"Watching the tunnies; if thou turn'st again
Thou well mayst meet him coming from the sea."
"Nay," said she, "neither wholly shall be vain
My coming so far, since I have with me
Poor offerings meet for the divinity
From poor folk, which my mother bade me bear
To bless this midmost month of the glad year."

"In a good hour," he said, "for I have done
Little against the roes whereof to tell,
So I will fare with thee; and till the sun
Is getting low, in our house shalt thou dwell,
And in the evening, if it like thee well,

With helmet on the head, and well-strung bow,
Beside thee to thine own home will I go."

Nought spake she for a while, and his heart beat
Quicker with hope of some small happiness;
But at the last her eyes his eyes did meet.
She spake: "Few hearts this heart of mine will bless,
And yet for thee will I do nothing less
Than save thee from the anguish of the strife,
Wherewith thou fain wouldst make my life thy life.

"Thou art unhappy now, but we may part,
And to us both is left long lapse of time
To gain new bliss. What wouldst thou? To my heart
Cold now and alien are this folk and clime,
And while I dwell with them no woe or crime,
If so I may, shall stain my garments' hem;
Thou art an image like the rest of them;

"Yea, but an image unto me alone,
For unto thee this world is wide enow,
Full of warm hearts enow—so get thee gone
Upon thy way. I am not fallen so low
As unto thee dreams of false love to show,
Or for my very heart's own weariness
To give thee clinging life-long sharp distress.

"Now fain I would unto the temple-stead;
And, if thou mayst, do thou go otherwhere,

For good it were that all thy hopes were dead,
Since nought but bitter fruit they now can bear"
He gazed at her as one who doth not hear,
Or hears an outland tongue ill understood;
Wild love and hate made wild-fire of his blood.

Yea, she belike was nigher unto death
Than she might know; yet did he turn at last
And, clutching tight his short-sword's gold-wrought
sheath,
Slowly along the seaward way he passed,
Nor backward at her any look he cast,
For fate would not that his blind eyes should see
How on the way her tears fell plenteously.

Yet not long there she stayed, but set her face
Unto the downward road, but had not fared
A many yards from that their meeting-place,
Before upon the wind a sound she heard,
As though some poor wretch a great sorrow bared
Unto the eyes of heaven, and then her feet
With quicker steps the stony way did meet.

And soon she said: "O fate, all left behind,
I follow thee adown the bitter road
With weary feet, and heavy eyes and blind,
That leadeth to thy far unknown abode;
No need, then, with thy stings my flesh to goad,
Keep them for those that strive with thee in vain,
And leave me to my constant weary pain."

Now the pass, widening, to her eyes did show
The little vale hemmed in by hills around,
Wherein was Jove's house fair and great enow,
Some three miles thence, but on a rising ground,
And with fair fields as a green girdle bound,
And guarded well by long low houses white,
Orchards for fruit, and gardens for delight.

Far off, like little spots of white, she saw
The long-winged circling pigeons glittering
Above the roofs, the noise of rook and daw
Came sweet upon the wind from the dark ring
Of elms that edged the cornfields; with wide wing
The fork-tailed restless kite sailed over her,
Hushing the twitter of the linnets near.

She stayed now, gazing downward; at her feet
A dark wood clad the hollow of the hill,
And its black shade a little lake did meet,
Whose waters smooth a babbling stream did still,
Then toward the temple-stead stretched on, until
Green meads with oaks beset 'gan hem it in,
And from its nether end the stream did win.

She gazed and saw not, heard and did not hear,
But said: "Once more have I been vehement,
Have spoken out, as if I knew from where
Come good and ill, and whither they are sent,
As though I knew whereon I was intent;

So, knowing that I know not, e'en as these
Who think themselves as gods and goddesses

"To know both good and evil must I do.
Now ne'er again in this wise shall it be
While here I dwell, nor shall false hope shine through
My prison bars, false passion jeer at me
With what might hap if I were changed and free;
The end shall come at last, and find me here,
Desiring nought, and free from hope or fear."

So saying, but with face cleared not at all,
Rather with trembling lips, upon her way
Once more she went; short now did shadows fall,
It grew unto the hottest of the day,
And round the mountain-tops the sky waxed grey
For very heat; June's sceptre o'er the earth,
If rest it gave, kept back some little mirth.

At last upon the bridge the stream that crosse
Just ere it met the lake she set her feet,
And walked on swiftly, e'en as one clean lost
In thought, till at its end her skirt did meet
A bough of briar-rose, whose pale blossoms sweet
Were draggled in the dust; she stooped thereto
And from her hem its hooked green thorns she drew,

Then drawing a deep breath, she cast aside
The broken bough; and from the dusty road

She turned, and o'er the parapet she eyed
The broad blue lake, the basking pike's abode,
And the dark oakwood where the pigeons cooed;
And as she gazed, some little touch of bliss
Came over her amidst her loneliness.

Drowsy she felt, and weary with the way,
And mid such listlessness that brought no pain,
She drew her arms from off the coping grey,
And o'er the bridge went slowly back again,
As though no whit of purpose did remain
Within her mind; but when the other end
She passed, along the stream she 'gan to wend.

She watched its eddies till it widened out
Into the breezy lake, and even there
Began the wood; so then she turned about,
And shading her grave eyes with fingers fair,
Beneath the sun beheld the temple glare
O'er the far tree-tops; then she cast her down
Within the shade on last year's oak-leaves brown.

There as she lay, at last her fingers stole
Unto the things that on her bosom lay,
She drew them forth and slowly 'gan unroll
The silken cloth, until a wandering ray
Upon the shoes' bright 'broideries 'gan to play
Through the thick leaves; and with a flickering smile
She 'gan her mind with stories to beguile.

Pondering for whom those dainty things were
wrought,
And in what land; and in what wondrous wise
She missed the gift of them; and what things brought
The sea-thieves to her land—until her eyes
Fell on her own gear wrought in homely guise,
And with a half smile she let fall the gold
And glistening gems her listless hand did hold.

Then long she lay there, gazing at the sky
Between the thick leaves, growing drowsier,
While slowly the grey rabbit hobbled by,
And the slim squirrel twisted over her
As one to heed not; as if none were near
The woodpecker slipped up the smooth-barked tree,
The water-hen clucked nigh her fearlessly.

But in a little while she woke, and still
Felt as if dreaming, all seemed far away
Save present rest, both hope and fear and ill;
The sun was past the middle of the day,
But bathed in flood of light the world still lay,
And all was quiet, but for faint sounds made
By the wood creatures wild and unafraid.

From out her wallet now coarse food she drew,
And ate with dainty mouth, then o'er the strip
Of dazzling sunlight where the daisies grew
Unto the babbling streamlet's rushy lip
She went, and kneeling down thereby did dip

Her hollow hand into the water grey
And drank, then back again she went her way.

There 'neath the tree-bole lay the glittering shoes,
And over them she stood awhile and gazed,
Then stooped adown as though one might not choose;
And from the grass one by the latchet raised,
And with the eyes of one by slumber dazed
Did off her own foot-gear, and one by one
Set the bright things her shapely feet upon.

Then to the thick wood slowly did she turn,
And through its cool shade wandered till once more
Thinner it grew, and spots of light did burn
Upon her jewelled feet, till lay before
Her upraised eyes a bay with sandy shore;
And 'twixt the waves and birds' abiding place
Was stretched a treeless, sunlit, grassy space.

Friendly the sun, the bright flowers, and the grass
Seemed after the dark wood; with upraised gown
Slowly unto the water did she pass,
And on the grassy edge she sat her down;
And since right swift these latter hours had flown
Less did the sun burn; there awhile she lay
Watching a little breeze sweep up the bay.

Shallow it was, a shore of hard white sand
Met the green herbage, and as clear as glass

The water ran in ripples o'er that strand,
Until it well-nigh touched the flowery grass;
A dainty bath for weary limbs it was,
And so our maiden thought belike, for she
'Gan put her raiment from her languidly.

Until at last from out her poor array,
Pure did she rise e'en as that other One
Rose up from out the ragged billows grey,
For earth's dull days and heavy to atone;
How like another sun her gold hair shone;
In the green place, as down she knelt, and raised
The glittering shoes, and long time on them gazed,

As on strange guides that thus had brought her there,
Then cast them by, so that apart they fell,
And in the sunlight glittering lay and fair,
Like the elves' blossoms, hard and lacking smell;
Then to the sward she stooped, and bud and bell
Of the June's children gat into her hand,
And left the grass for the scarce-covered sand.

She stood to watch the thin waves mount her feet
Before she tried the deep, then toward the wide,
Sun-litten space she turned, and 'gan to meet
The freshness of the water cool, and sighed
For pleasure as the little rippling tide
Lapped her about, and slow she wandered on
Till many a yard from shore she now had won.

There, as she played, she heard a bird's harsh cry,
And looking to the steep hill-side could see
A broad-winged eagle hovering anigh,
And stood to watch his sweeping flight and free
Dark 'gainst the sky, then turned round leisurely
Unto the bank, and saw a bright red ray
Shoot from a great gem on the sea-thieves' prey.

Then slowly through the water did she move,
Down on the changing ripple gazing still,
As loth to leave it, and once more above
Her golden head rang out the erne's note shrill,
Grown nigher now; she turned unto the hill,
And saw him not, and once again her eyes
Fell on the strange shoes' jewelled 'broideries.

And even therewithal a noise of wings
Flapping, and close at hand—again the cry,
And then the glitter of those dainty things
Was gone, as a great mass fell suddenly,
And rose again, ere Rhodope could try
To raise her voice, for now might she behold
Within his claws the gleam of gems and gold.

Awhile she gazed at him as, circling wide,
He soared aloft, and for a space could see
The gold shoe glitter, till the rock-crowned side
Of the great mountain hid him presently,
And she 'gan laugh that such a thing should be

So wrought of fate, for little did she fear
The lack of their poor wealth, or pinching cheer.

But when she was aland again and clad,
And turned back through the wood, a sudden thought
Shot through her heart, and made her somewhat glad;
"Small things," she said, "her feet had thither brought:
Perchance this strange hap should not be for nought."
And therewithal stories she 'gan to tell
Unto her heart how such things once befell,

How as it had been it might be again.
Then from her odorous breast she took the shoe
Yet left, and turned it o'er and o'er in vain,
If yet she might therein find aught of new
To tell her what all meant; and thus she drew
Unto the wood's edge, and once more sat down
Upon the fresh grass and the oak-leaves brown.

And there beneath the quickly sinking sun
She took again her foot-gear cast aside,
And, scarce beholding them now, did them on;
And while the pie from out the oak-boughs cried
Over her head, arose and slowly hied
Unto the road again, and backward turned
Up through the pass. Blood-red behind her burned

The sunless sky, and scarce awake she seemed,
As 'gainst the hill she toiled, and when at last

Beneath the moon far off the grey sea gleamed,
And all the rugged mountain road was passed,
Back from her eyes the wandering locks she cast,
And o'er her cheeks warm ran the tears, as she
Told herself tales of what she yet might be.

BUT cold awakening had she when she came
Unto the half-deserted homestead gate,
And she must think how she would take the blame
That from her mother did her deed await,
Without a slave-like frightened frown at fate;
Must harden yet her heart once more to face
Her father's wondering sigh at his hard case.

So when within the dimly-lighted hall
Her mother's wrath brake out, as she did hear
Her cold words, and her father's knife did fall
Clattering adown; then seemed all life so drear,
Hapless and loveless, and so hard to bear,
So little worth the bearing, that a pang
Of very hate from out her heart up-sprang.

With cold eyes, but a smile on her red lips,
She watched them; how her father stooped again
And took his knife, and how once more the chips
Flew from the bowl half finished, but in vain,
Because he saw it not; she watched the rain

Of tears wherewith her mother did bewail
That all her joy in her one child should fail.

But when her mother's tears to sobs were turned
The goodman rose and took her hand in his,
And then, with sunken eyes for love that yearned,
Gazed hard at her, and said, "Nay, child, some bliss
Awaits thee surely yet; enough it is;
Trouble and hunger shall not chase me long,
The walls of one abiding-place are strong;

"And thither now I go apace, my child."
Askance she looked at him with steady eyes,
But when she saw that midst his words he smiled
With trembling lips, then in her heart 'gan rise
Strange thoughts that troubled her like memories
And changed her face; she drew her hands from him,
And yet before her eyes his face waxed dim.

Then down the old man sat, and now began
To talk of how their life went, and their needs,
In cheerful strain; and, even as a man,
Unbeaten yet by fortune's spiteful deeds,
Spoke of the troublous twisted way that leads
To peace and happiness, till to a smile
The goodwife's tearful face he did beguile.

So slipped the night away, and the June sun
Rose the next morn as though no woe there were.

Upon the earth, and never anyone
Was blind with love or bent by hopeless care;
But small content was in the homestead there,
Despite the bright-eyed June, for unto two
That dwelt there life still held too much to do.

While to the third, empty of deeds it seemed,
A dragging dulness changed by here a pain
And there a hope, waking or sleeping dreamed,
But, waking still or sleeping, dreamed in vain;
For how could anything be loss or gain
When still the order of the world went round,
And still the wall of death all hopes did bound?

So said she oft, and fell to hating men;
Nevertheless with hope still beat her heart,
And changing thoughts that rose and fell again
Would stir within her as she sat apart,
And to her brow the unbidden blood would start,
And she would rise, nor know whereon she trod,
And forth she walked as one who walks with God.

Oftener indeed that dull and heavy mood
Oppressed her, and when any were anigh,
Little she spake, either of bad or good,
Nor would she heed the folk that were thereby
So much as thereon to look scornfully;
Unless perchance her father stood anear,
And then her set hard face she strove to clear.

And if he, fearful, answered with no smile
Unto the softening eyes, yet when he went
About his labour, would he so beguile
His heart with thought of her, that right content
He 'gan to feel with what the Gods had sent;
The little flame of love that in him burned,
Hard things and ill to part of pleasure turned.

Withal his worldly things went not so ill
As for a luckless man; the bounteous year
More than before his barn and vats did fill
With the earth's fruit, and bettered was his cheer,
So that he watched the winter draw anear
Calmly this tide, and deemed he yet might live,
Some joy unto his daughter's heart to give.

But for the one shoe that the erne had left,
The goodwife's word was, "Take the cursed thing,
And when the gems from out it are all reft,
Into the fire the weaver's rag go fling;
Would in like wise the fond desires, that cling
To Rhodope's proud heart, we thus might burn,
That she to some good life at last might turn!

"I think some poison with a double curse
Hath smitten her, and double wilfulness,
For surely now she groweth worse and worse,
Since the bright rag her wayworn foot did press—
Well then—and surely thou wilt do no less

Than as I bid—a many things we need,
More than this waif of cast-off-royal weed."

With querulous voice she spake, because she saw
Her husband look at Rhodope, as she
Still through her fingers did the grey thread draw
From out the rock, and sitting quietly
Seemed not to heed what all the talk might be;
But for the goodman's self he answered not,
Until at last the goodwife waxed o'er hot,

And laid hard word on word, till she began
To say, "Alas, and wherefore was I wed
To such an one as is a foredoomed man?
Lo, all this grief hast thou brought on my head,
So wander forth, and dream as do the dead
When to the shadowy land they first are brought!
Surely thou knowest that we lack for nought!"

Then blind with rage from out the place she went,
But still the goodman stood awhile, and gazed
At Rhodope, who sat as if intent
Upon her work, nor aught her fair head raised.
At last he spake: "Well, never was I praised
For wisdom overmuch before this day,
And can I now be certain of the way?

"True is it that our needs are many and sore,

And that those gems would help us plenteously,
Yet do I grudge now more than heretofore
The very last of that strange gift to see.
What sayest thou, how dost thou counsel me,
O daughter? didst thou ever hear folk tell
Of the strange dream that at thy birth befell?"

Blood-red her face grew as she looked on him,
And with her foot the twirling spindle stayed.
"Yea," said she, "something have I heard, but dim
My memory is, and little have I weighed
The worth thereof." The goodman smiled and said,
"Nay, child, as little wise as I may be,
Yet know I that thou liest certainly.

"And so no need there is to tell the tale,
Or ask thee more what thou wouldst have me do;
Have thou thy will, for fate will still prevail,
Though oft we deem we lead her thereunto
Where lies our good—Daughter, keep thou the shoe,
And let the wise men with their wisdom play,
While we go dream about a happier day."

While he was speaking had she laid adown
The rock, and risen unto her feet, and now
Upon her bosom lay his visage brown,
As round him both her fair arms did she throw;
Softly she said, "Somewhat thy need I know,

Remember this whatever happeneth,
Let it make sweet the space 'twixt this and death!

"Hard is the world; I, loved ere I was born,
This once alone perchance thy heart shall feel,
And thou shalt go about, of love forlorn,
And little move my heart of stone and steel:
Ah, if another life our life might heal,
And love become no more the sport of time,
Chained upon either hand to pain and crime!"

A little time she hung about him thus,
And then her arms from round his neck unwound,
And went her ways; his mouth grew piteous
When he had lost her fluttering gown's light sound,
And fast his tears 'gan fall upon the ground.
At last he turned: "So is it now," he said,
"With me as with a man soon to be dead.

"Wise is he all at once, and knows not why,
And brave who erst was timorous; fair of speech,
Whose tongue once stammered with uncertainty,
Because his soul to the dark land doth reach.
And is it so that love to me doth teach
New things, because he needs must get him gone,
And leave me with his memories all alone?"

SO the year passed, as has been writ afore,
With better hopes; the pinching winter-tide
Went by, and spring his tender longings bore
Into all hearts, and scattered troubles wide,
Nor yet to see the fruit of them would bide,
But left the burning summer next to deal
With hearts of men, and hope from them to steal.

Now came the time round even to the day
When Rhodope had made her journey vain
Unto the valley where the temple lay,
And now, too, when the morn was on the wane,
Before the homestead door she stood again,
For to the town she needs must go to bring,
For their poor household work, some needful thing.

So with slow feet she crossed the threshold o'er
With brow a little knitted, as if she
Dealt with some troublous thought, that oft before
Had mazed her mind: then no less, steadily
Through the fair day she went on toward the sea,
For by the port, and lying low adown,
Stretched out their unwalled simple market-town.

Some mile of highway had she got to pace,
Ere she might reach the first house of the street
That led unto the lowly market-place;
So on she went, and still her eyes did meet
The elm-tree shade that flickered o'er her feet.

Though thronged beyond its wont the white way was,
With folk well clad, who toward the town did pass,

Swiftly she went, till come half-way belike,
Then stayed her feet and looked up suddenly;
There by the way-side the hot sun did strike
Upon a patch of grass, whereon did lie
A grey old hound, and 'gainst an elm thereby
His master leaned, a shepherd older yet,
Whose deep-sunk eyes her eyes unwitting met.

Therewith a knot of folk she had just passed
Passed her in turn, maidens and youths they were,
Blithe with their life and youth; on her they cast
Such looks as if they had a mind to jeer,
Yet held back, some by wonder, some by fear,
Went on a space until they deemed them free,
Then through the summer day outburst their glee.

Her deep-eyes followed them, and yet, indeed,
As images she saw them; there a space
Musing she stood, then turned, and at slow speed
Went back again to her abiding-place,
Just as the old man moved his puckered face
To speak some word to her; and so at last,
O'er her own threshold inward her feet passed.

Then to her sleeping-room she went, and knel
Beside a chest, and raised the lid, and drew

From out the dark where year-long it had dwelt,
Remembered yet the while, the precious shoe,
And dreamy over it awhile she grew,
Then set it in her bosom, and went forth,
Pondering o'er what her fond desires were worth.

Still folk thronged on the highway; as she went
Some fragment of their talk would reach her ear
Howso upon her dreams she was intent;
Of new-come men they spake, their ways and gear,
How glorious of array, how great they were,
How huge and fair their galley, that last eve
The little black-quayed haven did receive.

That talk of strange and great things raised at last
New and wild hopes in her, but none the less
Straightway unto her journey's end she passed,
And did what she must do, nor cared to guess
Why in the market-place all folk did press
Around a glitter as of steel and gold
That in the midst thereof she did behold.

Yet, her work done, she gat her back again
Unto the market-place, and curiously
'Gan eye the concourse, yea, at last, was fain
Unto the heart thereof to come anigh;
Her heart beat; strange she felt and knew not why,
As on she went, and still the wondering folk
To right and left before her beauty broke.

A temple midmost of the market-place,
Raised to the Mother of the Gods there stood,
An ancient house in guise of other days,
And e'en amid that simple folk deemed rude;
Such as it was the country-folk thought good
To meet and talk there, o'er such things as they
Found hard to deal with as day passed by day.

So when she drew anigh its steps, thereon
She saw indeed a goodly company,
For there sat strange men, young and old, who shone
In such attire as scarce she thought could be,
And by these glittering folk from over sea
Were the land's fathers, and the chief-priest dight
To do a solemn sacrifice aright.

E'en as she came into the foremost rank,
Bright gleamed the slayer's falchion in the sun,
And silently the rose-crowned heifer sank
Upon the time-worn pavement; yet not one
Of all the sea-farers might gaze upon
Victim or priest, for forth stood Rhodope
Lone on the steps, a glorious thing to see.

For on a tripod by the altar's side,
Gleaming, as that day year agone it gleamed,
The shoe her foot had pressed she now espied,
And o'er her soul a sudden light there streamed,
While from her eager eyes such glory beamed.

That all folk stared astonished, all must wait
For her first word as for the stroke of fate.

Yea, there she stood, that all fair things did lack,
Clad in a gown of dark grey woollen stuff,
The wares she had just dealt for at her back,
And all about her homely, coarse, and rough,
Yet, since her beauty blessed them, good enough:
For, as a goddess wandering on the earth,
How might she deem earth's richest gauds of worth?

Gently, yet with no flush on her smooth cheek,
She mounted up the steps, and spake out clear:
"Perchance a match for yon fair thing ye seek
Ye seem to prize so much; it lieth here
And both of them on this day was-a-year
Were on my feet. My father will be glad
Because great joy in them the old man had."

Then rose a great shout up into the sky,
And in despite herself the blood would rise
Unto her cheek and brow, as quietly
From her white fragrant bosom, a world's prize,
She drew the mass of blazing 'broideries,
And laid it by its fellow, and her hand
Trembled, as there sun-litten she did stand.

Then cried a grey-beard, clad in gems and gold:
"Praise to the Gods who do all things aright,

And thus have given my weak eyes to behold
Now, at the end of life, so fair a sight,
Have given withal unto the worth and might
Of the great king so fair a mate as thee—
How good, how good it is thine eyes to see!"

She was pale now, though never a word she spake,
And held her head, as though a crown it wore,
And 'gan 'neath gold and golden hair to ache
With new-born longings, fears unknown before,
And calmly her deep eyes the men passed o'er
Who sat there marvelling; till the old man said:
"Wonder not overmuch, O glorious maid,

"At all these things! The Gods who wrought thee thus,
And kept thee here apart from ill men's eyes
To show thee forth so much more marvellous,
Have led our hearts unto thee in this wise;
For the great king did solemn sacrifice
Unto the Gods well-nigh a year agone,
And in the bright sun bright the altar shone.

"But e'en as to its highest shot the flame,
And to the awful Gods our hearts did turn,
A cry from out the far blue sky there came,
And a bright thing 'twixt flame and sun did burn,
And some there were who said they could discern
An eagle, like a faint speck, far above
The altar, whereon lay this gift of love.

"How this may be I know not, but the king
Trembled, and toward the altar stretched his hand,
And drew to him the strange-sent, fair-wrought thing,
And, thereon staring, a long while did stand,
And left the place, not giving such command
As he was wont, and still from that day forth
Took little heed of things once held of worth.

"Silent and pale, and strange-eyed still he grew,
And yet said nought hereon for many days,
Until at last he bade us take this shoe
And diligently search in every place
That we might come to, till we saw the face
Of her whose foot had touched it. 'Certainly,
Whereso she is, she hath been wrought for me.

"'Whereso she is, and by what name men name
Her loveliness and love unknown: lo now,
Young am I, and have heretofore had shame
To bend to love, e'en as my folk bend low
Before my throne, but now my pride doth grow
As a quenched candle in a golden house,
And through the dark I wander timorous.'

"We marvelled at his word, but deemed some God
Possessed his heart; but thenceforth constantly
Have we gone over the wide world, and trod
Rough ways enow, been tossed o'er many a sea,
And dealt with many a lie, until to thee

The Gods have brought us, O thou wondrous one!
That we might see thee ere our days are done."

"Ah me!" she said, "what thing do ye demand?
Is it a little thing that I should go,
Leaving my people and my father's land,
To wed some proud great man I do not know?
I look for no glad life; yea, it is so
That if a grain of love were left in me
In vain your keel had cleft our girdling sea.

"No need to speak; I know what ye would say—
—That where I go, still I and love shall rule,
That where I go I bear about the day
Made golden by my beauty—base and dull,
Mid hollow shows to strive with knave and fool,
With death, and nothing done, to end it all!
—Yet fear ye not! for surely I shall fall

"Where the Gods cast me, nor turn round about
To gaze on bygone time—so it shall be
E'en as ye will." They stared at her, in doubt
If her sweet lips had spoken; yea, and she
Flushed 'neath their eyes fixed on her wonderingly,
Wondering herself at the new fear, new scorn
That with beginning of new days was born.

But they, abased before the rough-clad maid,
Now led her to an empty ivory chair,

And each man knee unto the pavement laid,
And, unashamed, did reverence to her there;
And ever did she seem to grow more fair
Before their eyes, till fear arose in them
As they bent down to her rude garment's hem.

And then the rites unto the Gods went on,
While she sat musing on the wondrous tale;
And when all these at last were duly done,
They prayed her give command when they should sail:
She raised her face, grown quiet now and pale,
And said in a low voice: "Today were best,
For here at least may I have nought of rest.

"The old is gone, the new is not yet come,
Familiar things with strange eyes I behold,
And nowhere now I seem to have a home.
But when I go from homespun unto gold,
My father and mother, poor folk bent and old,
Beaten by fortune, needs must go with me,
And share my new proud life beyond the sea.

"And since the old man loveth me too well,
And hitherto small joy from me hath gained,
Meet is it that my lips alone should tell
How all is changed, and weal that long hath waned
Is waxen now, and the cold rain that rained
Upon his life's grey day hath met the sun,
And blossoms spring from the dull earth and dun.

"And, O ye folk, midst whom my feet have dwelt,
And whom I leave now, if so be, that I
Hard anger in my heart at whiles have felt
'Gainst things that pressed upon me wearily,
Yet now the kindness of time past draws nigh,
And ye will be my folk still, when I go
Unto a land where e'en your name none know."

Then, midst their marvelling silence, she arose,
And took her cast-down fardel up again,
And went her ways; and they, by whom all close
Her body passed, must tremble, and be fain
To think of common things to dull the pain
Of longing, as her lovely majesty,
Too sweet and strange for earth, brushed swiftly by.

And yet of earth she was, and as she went
Through the shrunk shadow to her old abode,
Fresh hope a new joy through her body sent,
The clear cold vision of her soul to cloud;
And less the striving world seemed like a load
To weary her, than a strange curious toy,
To solace life with foolish grief and joy.

Still grew that hope in her, and when she came
Unto the homestead, and her father met
Anigh the byre, then doubt, and fear, and shame,
Amid the joy of change did she forget,
As firm feet mid the loitering kine she set,

And cried aloud, "O father, turn and gaze
On Fortune's friend, the Queen of glorious days!"

He turned and stared upon her glittering eyes
And godlike mien, and 'gan to speak, but she
Cried out, "The very Gods may call us wise,
For great days have they given to thee and me,
Things stranger than these meadows shall we see,
And thou shalt wonder that thou e'er didst keep
These kine, as Phœbus erst Admetus' sheep!"

Then did she pour the whole tale out on him;
Eager at first, but faltered to behold
How he fell trembling in his every limb;
Through the new fever that her heart did fold,
Again shame thrust its steely point and cold:
"Alas," she thought, "when all the tale is done,
Why go we thus alone beneath the sun?"

He tried to speak, and the words came at last;
"If thou art glad, then surely I am glad—
—And yet, we thought our evil time had passed;
Surely the days grew not so wholly bad!
Ah me, a growing hope of late I had
Of quiet days and sweet—yet shame of me,
That I should dull the joy that gladdeth thee!

"Daughter, thy bidding I will surely do,
And go with thee; nathless bethink thee yet,

How yesterday shall seem full long ago,
When with to-morrow's dew the grass is wet.
Child, I will pray thee never to forget
This face of mine, this heart that loves thee well;
Let distance though, and time that sweet tale tell!"

She cried: "Ah, wilt thou have me lonelier
Than the Gods made me? As day passes day
The life of fear and hope that happened here,
Most oft no doubt shall seem full far away;
Yet be thou nigh, to be a scarce-felt stay
To my mazed steps, a green close fresh and sweet,
On life's hard way, to cool my weary feet.

"I will not take my bidding back; go thou,
And get thee ready swiftly to be gone.
The sails are flapping in the haven now,
And we depart before the day is done.
O be thou glad, thou shalt not be alone!
Canst thou not see e'en now how this my face
I softened to thee by the happy days?"

He said no more, but eyed her lovingly,
Upon his worn old face a trembling smile;
Then turned him toward the house with one great sigh,
And she was left alone a little while,
Her restlessness with strange dreams to beguile,
And though bright things those dreams did nowise lack
Yet oft oft-conquered cold fear would come back.

But midst her thoughts from out the house there came
Her father and her mother, and she gazed
Upon the twain with something more than shame,
As she beheld what timid eyes and mazed
The goodwife to her queenly beauty raised,
And how with patient mien her father went,
On all her motions lovingly intent.

Then to the market-place passed on the three,
And though her grey gown only covered her,
Her mother bore some shreds of bravery
And clad her father was in scarlet gear,
Worn now and wretched, that he once did bear
When long ago at his rich board he sat,
And all that land's best cheer the glad guests gat.

And as they stood there now, the simple folk,
Grown used unto the wonder of the tale,
Warmed with new joy, and into shouts outbroke;
The goodwife flushed, but the old man turned pale,
And gazed round helpless, his limbs seemed to fail
As though age pressed him sore; while Rhodope
Grew softer-eyed and spake majestically;

"Fain am I, lords, that we depart straightway;
For if a dream this is, I long full sore
E'en in my dream to feel the wind-blown spray,
And hear the well-timed rolling of the oar,
And ere dark night behold the lessening shore

From your dreamed dromond's deck—so pass we on,
If e'en so far as this my dream hath won."

Then said they: "All is ready in due wise,
E'en as thou bad'st, the ship has been warped round
And rideth toward the sea, and sacrifice
Has there been done, and goodly gifts been found
For this land's folk: but wilt thou not be crowned
And clad in fair array of gold, that we
May show thy beauty meetly to the sea?"

"Nay," said she, "in this lowly guise of mine
Let the king first behold me standing there
The Gods' gift, that his heart may more incline
Towards mine, if thus he note me strange and fair,
Grown up a queen, yet with no wondrous care
For what I should be. Make no more delay,
Low looks the sun upon the watery way."

So seaward now with these all people moved
Rejoicing, though belike they scarce knew why,
And Rhodope 'gan feel herself beloved;
And as the south wind breathed deliciously
O'er flowers and sweet things, and the sun did die
Amid soft golden haze, her loveliness
She 'gan to feel, and all the world to bless.

In her slim hand her father's hand she took,
Her red lips trembled, and her eyes were wet

With tears that fell not; but the old man shook
As one who sees death; then a hand she set
Upon his shoulder, and said, "Long years yet,
With loving eyes these eyes shalt thou behold
Among the glimmer of fair things and gold."

But nought he answered, and they came full soon
To where the gangway ran from out the ship
On to the black pier; white yet was the moon,
And the sun's rim nigh in the sea did dip,
And from the place where sky met ocean's lip,
Ran a great road of gold across the sea,
Where played the unquiet waves impatiently.

Now was her foot upon the gangway plank;
Now over the green depths and oars blood-red
Fluttered her gown, and from the low green bank
Above the sea a cry came, as her head
Gleamed golden in the way that westward led,
And on the deck her feet were, but no more
She looked back then unto the peopled shore.

But with one hand held back as if to take
Her father's hand, she went on toward the prow;
And there she stood, and watched the billows break,
Nor noted when men back the ropes did throw,
And scarce knew when the sea fell from the bow
And the ship moved, nor turned, till, cold and grey,
And darkling fast, the waste before her lay.

But at the last she turned on well-poised feet,
And gazed adown the twilight decks, and heard
The freshening wind about the cordage beat,
The master's and rough helmsman's answering word,
And all alone she felt now, and afeard,
In spite of all the folk who stood around,
Unto her lightest service straightly bound.

A terror seized her; down the deck she passed,
Her gown driven close against her, and her hair
Loosed by the driving wind; till at the mast
She stayed, and muttered: "Ah, he is not there!
And I, where am I? the dream seemed so fair
When it began; but now am I alone,
Waiting, I know not what, till life be done."

Trembling she drew her hand across her brow
As one who wakes; and then, grown calm once more,
She went with steady feet unto the prow,
And ran the line of reverent faces o'er
With anxious eyes, and stayed at last before
The ancient grey-haired man, the chief of these,
And spoke amid the washing of the seas:

"Where is my father? I am fain to speak
Of many things with him, we two alone;
For mid these winds and waves my heart grows weak
With memory of the days for ever gone."
The moon was bright, the swaying lanterns shone

On her pale face, and fluttering garment's hem—
—Each stared on each, and silence was on them.

And midst that silence a new lonely pain,
Like sundering death, smote on her, till he spoke:
"O queen, what sayst thou? the old man was fain,
He told us, still to dwell among his folk;
He said, thou knew'st he might not bear the yoke
Of strange eyes watching him—what say I more,
Surely thou know'st he never left the shore?

"I deemed him wise and true: but give command
If so thou willest; certes no great thing
It is, in two hours space to make the land,
Though much the land-wind now is freshening."
One slender hand to the rough shroud did cling,
As her limbs failed; she raised the other one,
And moved her lips to bid the thing be done:

Yet no words came, she stood upright again,
And dropped her hand and said, "I strive with change,
I strive with death the Gods' toy, but in vain:
No otherwise than thus might all be strange."
Therewith she turned, her unseeing eyes did range
Wide o'er the tumbling waste of waters grey,
As swift the black ship went upon her way.

DARK night upon the cold still eve did fall
Amidst the tale, and now the fair guest-hall
Was lit with nought but firelight, as they sat,
Silent, soft-hearted, and compassionate
Midst their own flickering shadows; yet too old
They were, to talk about the story told,
Too old, and knew too well what each man thought,
And feared in any pleasure to be caught,
That hid a snare of sadness at its end.
So slowly did the tale's sweet sorrow blend
With their own quenched desires, and past regret,
And dear-loved follies they might scarce forget;
That in these latter days indeed, were grown
Nought but a tale, for others to bemoan,
Who had not learned with sorrow's self to deal;
Who had no need an hour of bliss to steal,
With trembling hands, from the dark treasury
Of time long unregarded, long gone by,
Where cobwebbed o'er amid the dust it lay.
But these stole not, nor strove, from day to day
Enough of pleasure to their lot did fall
To stay them, that on death they should not call
With change or rest to end the weary tide;
Though careless now, his coming did they bide.

SCARCE aught was left of autumn-tide to die
When next they met; the north-east wind rushed by
The house anigh the woods, wherein they were,
And in the oaks and hollies might they hear
Its roar grow greater with the dying morn:
A hard grey day it was, yet scarce forlorn,
Since scarcely aught of tender or of sweet
Was left the year, its ruggedness to meet.
Bare was the country-side of work and folk:
There from the hill-side stead straight out the smoke,
Over the climbing row of corn-ricks, sailed;
And few folk stirred; a blue-clad horseman hailed
A shepherd from the white way, little heard
'Twixt ridge and hollow by November seared;
The ferryman stared long adown the road
That led unto his tottering thatched abode,
Ere the dark speck into a goodwife turned;
The smouldering weed-heap by the garden burned;
Side-long the plough beside the field-gate lay,
With no one nigh to scare the birds away,
That twittered mid the scanty wisps of straw.
So round the fire the ancient folk did draw,
And, mid the day-dreams, that hung round about,
Rather beheld the wild-wood dim with doubt,
And twilight of the cloudy leafless tide,

Than the scant-peopled fallow country-side,
Whose fields the woods hemmed in: the world grew
old
Unto their eyes, and lacked house, field, and fold.

Then spake a wanderer; "Long the tale I tell,
Though in few years the deeds thereof befell,
In a strange land and barren, far removed
From southlands and their bliss; yet folk beloved,
Yearning for love, striving 'gainst change and hate,
Strong, uncomplaining, yet compassionate,
Have dwelt therein—a strange and awful land
Where folk, as in the hollow of God's hand,
Beset with fearful things yet fearing nought,
Have lived their lives and wondrous deeds have
wrought—
Wild deeds, as other men. Yet these at least,
If death from but a rough and homely feast
Drew them away, lived not so full of care,
They and their sons, but that their lives did bear
The fruit of deeds recorded. Bear with me
If I shall seem to hold this history
Of a few freemen of the farthest north,
A handful, as a thing of too much worth;
Because this Iceland was my fathers' home,
Nay, somewhat of the selfsame stock they come
As these I tell of: know withal that we
Have ever deemed this tale as true to be,
As though those very Dwellers in Laxdale,

Risen from the dead had told us their own tale;
Who for the rest while yet they dwelt on earth
Wearied no God with prayers for more of mirth
Than dying men have; nor were ill-content
Because no God beside their sorrow went
Turning to flowery sward the rock-strewn way,
Weakness to strength, or darkness into day.
Therefore, no marvels hath my tale to tell,
But deals with such things as men know too well;
All that I have herein your hearts to move,
Is but the seed and fruit of bitter love."

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